

## TESTIMONY

# Before the Council of the City of New York Committee on Youth Services Hearing on Preliminary Fiscal 2025 Budget

**Presented by** 

**Commissioner Keith Howard** 

March 22, 2024



Good morning, Chair Stevens, and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. I am DYCD Commissioner Keith Howard. I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Alan Cheng and Chief Financial Officer Nevita Bailey. We are pleased to be here to discuss the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget.

The budget stands at \$1.1 billion. It is composed of:

- \$877 million, or 77.7 %, in city tax levy funds;
- \$141 million, or 12.5%, in intracity funds;
- \$99 million, or 8.8%, in federal funds; and
- \$11 million, or about 1%, in state funding.

This budget demonstrates Mayor Adams's strong commitment to young people and families. It will support DYCD's investments in programs to alleviate the effects of poverty and to provide opportunities for New Yorkers and communities to flourish.

As you know, we are deep into our planning for the 2024 Summer Youth Employment Program, and I would like to thank the Council for your strong support of the program. Last summer, which was the 60th anniversary of the program, New York City again provided 100,000 summer job opportunities for young people ages 14 through 24 at more than 17,000 work sites. We were pleased that 30 City Council members hosted SYEP workers, and for this summer we hope that all 51 will participate.

To reach a wide range of young people, we offered the application and marketing materials in nine languages. About 11,500 participants were part of tailored experiences for youth with barriers to employment, including youth with disabilities, youth experiencing homelessness, and youth who are justice involved. Our program reached nearly 16,000 youth from communities at highest risk of gun violence and over 13,000 of our participants were residents of NYCHA developments, the highest number served to date. More than 20,000 were part of the CareerReady program, which works with schools to align the SYEP experience with high school academic learning.

We released the 2024 application for participants and worksites on January 22, 2024 - the earliest application release ever. With a focus on program quality, we believe that this early release will give participants more time to prepare for their summer experiences and give providers time to work with the NYC business and nonprofit community to develop additional worksites. To date, we have held 25 targeted recruitment events in priority police precincts, worked with Crisis Management Services (CMS) groups, and partnered with NYCHA so that applicants can make use of their digital vans. The online application closed last Friday but we are continuing targeted recruitment to allow participants with barriers to employment the opportunity to apply.



This year all SYEP participants will receive at least two hours of financial literacy education as required by Local Law 98 of 2023. DYCD also launched a financial empowerment peer mentoring pilot, in which select Work, Learn, Grow (WLG) participants will take CUNY courses on financial literacy and serve as peer mentors during SYEP.

Work, Learn and Grow, a school-year extension of SYEP, is now serving over 7,000 youth, its largest class to date with more than one-third of enrolled youth residing in or attending school in the six priority police precincts identified in the Mayor's Blueprint for Community Safety. Also for the first time, our CMS providers had the opportunity to participate in WLG with 19 CMS groups enrolling over 330 participants. 38 WLG participants are serving as Youth Ambassadors to students in temporary housing, with a focus on migrant youth.

In addition to our SYEP planning, we are actively preparing for another summer of wide-ranging enrichment programs for the City's Summer Rising program, in partnership with NYC Public Schools. Applications for this summer opened March 1 and will close on March 25, and we expect to again serve 110,000 elementary and middle school students and connect them with fun, hands-on enrichment experiences to strengthen skills, develop interests and cultivate curiosity! Some examples of the programming that will be offered include drama, yoga, community service, visual art, sports, and cooperative games. We appreciated the opportunity to brief Chairs Stevens and Joseph last week on this summer's program.

Last year, we introduced Exploring Futures, a new feature of the program for middle school students to facilitate early career exploration aligned with their individual interests and passions. This program exposed students to a wide array of career paths, enabling them to navigate and explore fields that may have otherwise been unfamiliar to them. The program included visits to CUNY campuses, career-connected field trips, and workplace tours. We look forward to another year of this exciting programming.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) officially joined DYCD in FY24. This office includes the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, the Office to Prevent Gun Violence, Atlas, and Precision Employment Initiative. These programs are aligned with DYCD's mission and improve community-police relations, reduce crime, incarceration, and diminish contact with the justice system.

Outreach included supporting hundreds of Staten Islanders in the wake of youth violence on the borough's North Shore, and CMS teams helping to make J'ouvert and the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn the safest in recent memory. ONS plays a major role in carrying out "A Blueprint for Community Safety," announced by Mayor Adams in July.



Finally, we are pleased to announce a new program, the Neighborhood Youth Team Sports Program, which offers awards of up to \$50,000 for youth sports programming. This opportunity for competitive youth sports programs, which is supported by a new State funding source, is now open for applications in PASSPort – bids are due by April 12. We encourage community groups to apply for contracts that will begin on July 1. The new program is in addition to the Saturday Night Lights program which serves young people at 136 sites citywide. Saturday Night Lights programs offer safe and engaging evening sports programs, including basketball, soccer, volleyball, dance, and martial arts.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget. We are pleased to answer your questions.





Jess Dannhauser Commissioner

Testimony to the New York City Council Children and Youth Committee March 22, 2024

Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Children and Youth

Good afternoon. I am Jess Dannhauser, the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Thank you Chair Stevens, and the members of the Children and Youth Services Committee, for holding today's hearing on our Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025. I appreciate the opportunity to share the important work we are doing at ACS to help make New York City a more safe, just and equitable place for children, youth and families to live and thrive. I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Winette Saunders, and Margaret Pletnikoff, who is the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Finance.

I want to take a moment to recognize that this is ACS's first hearing before this new Committee formed to specifically focus on the children, youth and families of New York City - thank you to the Chair and members of the Committee for your commitment to children and their families. We at ACS are grateful and look forward to working together with all of you in the coming years.

At ACS we envision a New York City where children and youth are safe and thriving and families are supported as their most important resources and protectors. My testimony today will focus on some of our many accomplishments from this past year, as well as our budget plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

## Protecting Children and Respecting Families

As you may know, ACS is required by law to respond to all reports of suspected abuse or maltreatment forwarded to us by the New York Statewide Central Register (SCR). ACS has no discretion with regard to which reports to respond to, and we never conduct an investigation absent a report. This past year, ACS responded to 61,505

SCR reports, of which 38% involved Black families, 45% involved Hispanic/Latinx families, 7% involved Asian families and 5% involved White families. We know that in New York City a Black child is nearly 7 times more likely to be the subject of an SCR report than a White child and that a Hispanic child is nearly 5 times more likely to be the subject of a report than a White child.

ACS does not control the front door of the child protection system because we do not and cannot control what calls are made to the state nor what reports the state accepts. Nonetheless, this administration has decided that we have a vital role to play in informing the decision-making of mandated reporters through new trainings and by widening pathways to family support without an investigation. To be clear, many reports we receive are entirely appropriate, called in by people who in good faith believe a child is in danger or at risk of maltreatment. There are also situations where we believe that there would have been a better option to support families, because even though a family might need some help, a child is not in danger. Given this, we are taking a number of steps to reduce unnecessary calls to the SCR and increase supports for families without the need for an investigation, or without a report at all.

Our job at ACS must be to get this right—to help reduce the volume of unnecessary reporting, on the one hand, and on the other to ensure our child protection teams have the training, support and resources to identify the children who are in danger, make sound decisions, and ensure that families who need help get it.

With the support of our Deputy Mayor, ACS has embarked on a city-wide strategy to reduce the number of unnecessary child welfare responses and replace SCR reports, where appropriate, with supports that can meet the needs of families

further upstream. This is how we can reduce the number of families experiencing the formal child protection system, prevent child maltreatment, and help families feel and be comfortable and safe enough to ask for and receive help without judgement or fear. Specifically, we have been collaborating with city agencies, whose staff in mandated reporter roles generate the highest volume of reports, to provide revised training and supportive materials so that they better understand when a report is necessary, and, when it is not, how they can support a family without reporting to the SCR.

For example, we have jointly trained over 6,000 staff at NYC Public Schools (the largest source of reports citywide) in more than 65 sessions, and developed a training that reached tens of thousands of school-based personnel last Fall. As a result, we have seen the number of SCR reports from schools drop by more than 10% so far this school year, alongside a substantial increase in referrals from schools directly to prevention programs and other supportive services without i involving the child protection system. We have also been training Department of Homeless Services shelter staff and DYCD after-school providers, and we helped revise a training for Health and Hospitals staff. These tailored sessions provide mandated reporters with tools they need to not only assess whether a report is truly needed, but also how to connect families with services and supports outside of the traditional child protection system.

For those cases that are called in to the SCR, we have increased the percentage that we assign to the CARES track, which is NYC's version of a state-authorized, noninvestigative child protection response in appropriate cases. With CARES, there is no traditional investigation, no court involvement and no determination. In CARES,

specially trained child protective staff assess the safety of the children and then partner with the family to identify their needs, empower the family to make decisions that address their needs and the needs of their children, and connect families to appropriate services. The CARES approach is family-centered, family-driven and solution focused.

In just two years, we doubled the number of CARES units from 31 to 64 and the number of CARES cases opened rose 150% from 4,013 in CY 2021 to 10,054 in CY 2023, with now more than 25% of incoming child protection cases diverted to the non-investigative CARES track.

This past October, we initiated a pilot to standardize the information child protection staff provide to families at the start of an investigation, so parents are explicitly informed of their rights at the start of an investigation. We are the first in the state to provide a standardized, printed, plain-language notification of rights to parents at the onset of an investigation. In January 2024, we determined the pilot was successful and we are expanding the use of this notification to be citywide before the end of June 2024.

We want to minimize the involvement of families with child protection and the Family Courts whenever safely possible. With the expansion of CARES and the implementation of a state law (which ACS supported) that changed the standard of evidence in child protection cases, we have seen the number of families with findings of abuse or neglect dropping steadily in recent years, down 14 percent from 2021 to 2023, which is nearly 2,000 families fewer. We have reduced the number of ACS Article 10 filings in Family Court seeking court supervision even more sharply, down by 25%

since 2021 and by more than 50% since 2019.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the ACS Financial Plans better align our staffing models as we have been able to decrease headcount for both the family court attorneys who would have handled these cases and the child protection staff in the family service units who would have supervised these families. This \$1.1 million gross reduction (\$433,000 CTL) for 15 lawyers and \$2.9 million gross (\$1.1 million CTL) reduction for 40 child protection staff are vacancy reductions reflecting our reduced involvement with families, with no impact to current staff.

## Providing Services and Supports Upstream

We are also working hard to reduce families' interaction with the child protection system by providing resources and support upfront. We are taking intentional efforts to increase the number and percentage of families whose prevention program participation initiates with a community-based referral rather than following a report to the SCR or an investigation. New York City has one of the most robust prevention service arrays in the country. Our prevention services can provide help with concrete needs, parenting skills, service referrals, and counseling, and are available regardless of immigration status.

We have been adjusting our prevention programs to reflect the changing needs of communities. This has included taking steps in the past few financial plans to close the most underutilized programs and right-size slot capacity in our intensive Family Treatment and Rehabilitation (FT/R) model, while also launching a new respite program

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In 2021, there were 14,181 indicated cases and in 2023 there were 12,189 indicated cases. In 2019, we filed 4,145 petitions in Family Court seeking court ordered supervision; this was down to 2,732 filings in 2021 and 2,040 in 2023.

and a new School Based Early Support prevention model with contracts that will begin July 1, 2024. We have been transparent and collaborative with our prevention provider partners throughout this process, and we have significant capacity available in all program types throughout the City. In CY 2023, almost 15,000 families were served in ACS-contracted prevention programs.

Our new school-based early support prevention services program aims to provide families with meaningful and effective support while avoiding unnecessary child protective responses by more easily connecting families in need to services and resources. The new programs build upon ACS's ongoing work with NYC Public Schools to reduce unnecessary reports to the SCR. The school-based early support program will address stressors (economic, academic or behavioral) that may impact a child's well-being, help address families' concrete needs to help prevent future child welfare involvement and help strengthen social connections and engagement within the school community. Families can be referred to school-based early support programs by school personnel or community-based service providers or seek services on their own. –

Beginning in July 2024, the school-based early programs will serve approximately 1,280 families each year at elementary and middle schools. As part of their contracts, provider agencies offering these programs will identify at least three partner elementary and/or middle schools in their districts and must maintain a presence in each school. Providers are also required to collaboratively co-design at least four school-based offerings per year based on the needs and priorities of the school community. These may include school outreach efforts, youth development activities, peer support groups, cultural celebrations and other types of events that may

connect families to other community resources. As part of this new program, a portion is being funded with just city funds, which will allow some families to participate in services without the need to open a traditional prevention service case.

We have also continued our work to expand Family Enrichment Centers (FECs). Last month, we announced the next 9 providers recommended for awards. FECs are welcoming walk-in centers that are co-designed with community members to enhance protective factors, like social connectedness, access to supports and concrete needs, and parental resiliency. Key to the success of the FEC model is that our provider partners work hard to ensure community members play a central role in each Center's unique design to meet the wants and needs of local children and families. There are currently 12 FECs open throughout the City and we would be very pleased to arrange a time for the Committee to visit some of the FECs.

Our Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention is continuing to lead efforts to provide parents, caregivers, and child-serving professionals with the information and resources they need to avoid unintentional injuries and keep children safe. This week is National Poison Prevention Week and tomorrow we are once again reminding parents, family members and other adults about the poisoning risks associated with medications, household chemicals, button batteries, cannabis-infused edible products, and other toxic household items. Tomorrow, along with our partners at the NYC Poison Center, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Life of Hope Center in Brooklyn, we will share information about the risks and symptoms of poisoning in children and provide guidance on how to safely store medicines, cannabis-infused products, and other potential poisons and what to do if you know or suspect a child has been exposed. Participants

will receive free lock boxes to keep medicines and potentially toxic household items locked and out of sight and reach of children.

## Expanding Access to Child Care Assistance

We are also focused on increasing access to child care by providing families vouchers that help them pay for care. ACS currently provides child care assistance through child care vouchers supported by the State Child Care Block Grant, as well as other state, federal, and city funds. Child care assistance from ACS is available to eligible low-income families (with income at or below 85% State Median Income, or \$99,250 for a family of four), as well as families with child welfare involvement. ACS has been working hard to expand support for low-income families, and from January 2023 to January 2024, the number of children enrolled in care with the support of an ACS-issued low-income voucher rose 134% (from 13,781 to 32,217).

I want to take a moment to thank the child care staff who have been processing this new volume of applications and the City Hall team for creating the new MyCity portal so families can complete their applications online.

## Strengthening Foster Care

Our commitment to providing families with the services and supports they need as far upstream as possible has led to a continued decline in the number of children in foster care, with a historic low of under 6,400. For those children and youth who do need to come into foster care, ACS has maintained our commitment to placing children with kin, meaning family or close friends, with 45% of children currently in care are with family or friends.

ACS is also committed to working with our provider partners to provide children and youth in care and their families with the services and supports they need to thrive and, in most cases, return home. To accomplish this, ACS re-procured foster care, with contracts that began this past July 2023. Throughout this transition year, our provider partners have brought on a new workforce of parent advocates with lived experience, to help parents navigate the child welfare experience and safely reunify with their children more quickly. They have also implemented a new trauma-informed training for foster parents and staff, and incorporated the new Enhanced Family Foster Care (EFFC) program, which blends the traditional regular and therapeutic models into one program with more substantial resources and supports, and which will increase stability for children even as their therapeutic needs may fluctuate over time. The EFFC model also embeds parent advocates on case planning teams, to increase parent voice in service and permanency planning.

We are continuing to strengthen our programs and initiatives that have demonstrated success including Fair Futures, which provides coaching and tutoring to thousands of youth up to age 26, and College Choice, which is now providing housing,

tuition, stipends and other supports to more than 350 youth in foster care while they attend college.

## Strengthening Juvenile Justice Programs

ACS also oversees services and programs for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice continuum, which includes community-based alternatives for youth who are at risk, as well as for their families; alternative to detention programs; secure detention services at Crossroads Juvenile Center (Brooklyn) and Horizon Juvenile Center (Bronx); nonsecure detention services; and the Close to Home juvenile justice placement system. Our goal for all of these programs is to provide youth with the educational and behavioral skills and supports they need to thrive while preventing further or deeper penetration into the justice system. The juvenile justice system has transformed and thankfully, we rarely see youth with minor offenses in our detention programs, as they are diverted toward community based therapeutic interventions.

Upon opening 25 years ago, Crossroads and Horizon Juvenile Centers served youth who were, on average, 14 and 15 years old. The vast majority of those young people were remanded for less than 60 days on family court charges. As a result of Raise the Age, 16- and 17-year-olds charged in the Youth Parts of Supreme Court and ordered to be detained are now held in juvenile facilities instead of adult jails and these young people can remain in ACS facilities until they turn 21 years of age.

Today, there are 240 youth across our 2 secure detention centers, which are now approved by the state for a total combined capacity of 267. About half of these young

people are over age 18 and about 70% are being detained on charges related to gun violence.

Acknowledging this older population of youth, and longer lengths of stay, we are taking steps to transform our detention centers to comprehensively meet their needs and capacity for insight, growth, and change. To better serve young people in detention, ACS is working to build an annex at Horizon Juvenile Center. The annex, which will be constructed within the current footprint of Horizon, will include larger classrooms, including specialized arts/science classrooms, and trade workshops to allow us to offer new, innovative vocational programming; an industrial kitchen with an expanded serving area and additional dining halls; 8-bed residential units; an expanded medical/mental health clinic; and improved spaces for outdoor recreation. Moreover, modern design will engender a developmentally appropriate, trauma-responsive environment that promotes wellness, healing and equity. These enhancements will help us meet the unique needs of these young adults in our care today. The funds for the Annex are in our capital budget.

ACS is continuing to strengthen our community-based programming, and collaborating with our city partners to do the same. It is important to note that New York City's juvenile detention population is smaller than other large American cities. Chicago, which is one-third the size of NYC, has a population in detention that is more than 65% of NYC's secure census. Philadelphia, which is five times smaller than NYC, has almost the same number of young people in secure detention.

While most of the youth in our secure detention facilities have cases pending in the adult court system, youth with cases in the Family Court system are also now older

and have more serious cases. Many of them have had their cases removed to the Family Court from the Supreme Court. These youth are often ordered to be placed in our Close to Home system, which is limited to youth classified as juvenile delinquents (JDs) in Family Court and ordered to be in residential placement. Close to Home programs offer structured residential care for youth in a small, supervised, and homelike environment. In contrast to the traditional larger juvenile placement facilities model so common in other jurisdictions, Close to Home programs have been intentionally designed to enhance participation in programming while preserving the safety and security of youth, staff, and the community.

Today, there are approximately 90 youth in Close to Home. Over the past several financial plans, ACS has reduced unused Close to Home capacity, and in the most recent plan, our budget for Close to Home is aligned with our new contracts for 147 beds, which will go into effect this July.

Earlier this month, ACS announced the programs recommended for the new Close to Home awards. The foundation and mission of Close to Home will remain in place as the new contracts are implemented. Programs will be evidence based, and effective in addressing the needs of the population served. In addition, the youth, their families, and community will be the primary motivation in making sure that services and resources offered include behavioral support, educational specialists, recreational staff and aftercare services. Youths' treatment will start the first day of placement, focusing on successful reintegration within their families and communities. Close to Home will continue to provide Fair Futures coaches to our youths to help with reentry to the community beyond completion of their Close to Home program.

## The Budget

ACS's proposed budget for City Fiscal Year 2025 is \$2.7 billion, including \$830 million of City Tax Levy. This represents a 1% decrease from FY24 Adopted budget and is due in large part to savings measures instituted in the November Plan, this January plan, and one-year Council and Administration funded initiatives.

As you can see in this testimony, our implementation of the Citywide PEGs in both the November and January budget plans have been as thoughtful and strategic as possible, focusing on reductions that will not negatively impact our programming to support families. In addition, we have closed the remaining gap through revenue maximization.

### Conclusion

As you can see, ACS and our providers have continued to make progress in our efforts to support children, youth and families, in the least intrusive manner possible. As Commissioner, I have the opportunity to meet with, shadow and learn from staff from throughout the City, including our child protection Borough Offices, legal units, detention facilities, the Children's Center, the training sites, the child care resource areas, and the hard-working administrative teams. I continue to meet with and visit our provider agencies' prevention, foster care, FEC, community partnership and juvenile justice sites. I continued to be deeply moved by the commitment and passion the staff have for supporting families. I want to take a moment to thank all of the staff from ACS and our provider agencies for the work they do each and every day.

I also have the opportunity to listen to those with lived experience with the child welfare and juvenile justice system, along with the advocates, legal service providers, philanthropic community, and communities themselves. We know that there will always be more work to do. We remain committed to listen closely, particularly to those who have first-hand experiences with our system, and to continue to learn so that we can deepen our understanding and evolve our work even further.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# Jumaane D. Williams

## TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH MARCH 22, 2024

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to Chair Stevens and the members of the Committee on Children and Youth for holding this hearing today.

In FY23, the administration increased the number of slots for SYEP to a record 100,000, and that funding will continue through FY26. This is a historic investment in the young people of this city, and I applaud Mayor Adams for guaranteeing it for at least the next two years. However, the preliminary budget for FY25 fails to fund \$5.5 million for SYEP Metro Cards, which was included in the FY24 adopted budget. Especially with the recent fare raise, we should not be financially burdening young people in any way as a requirement to participate in SYEP.

According to the City Comptroller, as of February 18, 2024, more than 178,600 asylum-seekers have gone through the New York City emergency shelter system, with 65,000 currently in shelter.<sup>1</sup> Initially, the city responded with emergency shelters provided through DHS, but over time, other agencies began providing shelter, including DYCD. DYCD provides shelter beds for youth between the ages of 16 and 20, and for young people ages 21 to 24, and these programs provide counseling, education, job training and other services that are not typically available at adult shelters.<sup>2</sup> However, youth and young adults are increasingly turning to the city's Department of Homeless Services-run adult shelters because youth shelters do not have room. As NYC is in an unprecedented housing crisis, funding shelter and homeless services needs to be a priority. Prior to the arrival of migrants, the city did not have enough youth shelters to meet the need; last year, DYCD funded about 800 shelter beds for young people, most of them reserved for youth under the age of 21.<sup>3</sup> That number only accommodates a fraction of the population in need of a youth shelter bed, which in 2022 was estimated to be just over 5,000.<sup>4</sup> This past fall, the Coalition for Homeless Youth counted more than 200 youth in a 12-day period that it had to

https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/comments-on-new-york-citys-preliminary-budget-for-fiscal-year-2025-and-financial-plan-for-fiscal-years-2024-2028/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://citylimits.org/2022/09/29/nycs-youth-shelter-system-is-running-out-of-space/</u>

https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY23\_LL86\_RHY\_Demographics-and-Services\_Report-Final.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/2022\_NYC\_Youth\_Count\_Report.pdf</u>

turn away from its youth shelter.<sup>5</sup> I do want to be very clear: migrant youth are just as deserving of shelter as youth born and raised in New York City or anywhere else in the United States. We can and must do better for our young people.

Youth are increasingly turning to drop-in centers, of which there are eight across New York City, and serve as the formal gateway to the shelter system. In January, 1,600 youth spent time in city drop in centers, a 28 percent increase from July 2023.<sup>6</sup> These drop-in centers provide young people with clothing, food, and showers—they also used to have cots where people could rest temporarily, but the Adams Administration last year issued an order to the non-profits who run the centers prohibiting sleeping, a directive many criticized as inhumane.<sup>7</sup> Despite the overwhelming need for shelter for young people, the proposed FY25 budget proposes cutting \$2 million from the \$52 million allocated for runaway and homeless youth, eliminating 16 positions that help young people access permanent housing options.<sup>8</sup>

Other programs provided by DYCD have also experienced abrupt reductions in their budgets. The Comprehensive After School System (COMPASS) is a network of more than 890 after-school programs that serve NYC K-12 students.<sup>9</sup> These programs are offered at no cost to their participants, and are housed in a variety of locations including schools, community centers, public housing, and religious institutions. COMPASS Explore is smaller and offers more specialized services, with some specifically aimed at serving LGBTQ youth or students with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> School's Out New York City (SONYC) functions similarly to COMPASS, but is specifically for students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. This model is structured like a club, and provides instruction in sports and arts, and requires youth leadership through service.<sup>11</sup> These programs are slated to lose \$7 million in the proposed budget, with the entire COMPASS Explore has nearly 1,900 seats, and SONYC is set to lose 1,660 of their 50,000 seats. These cuts are especially concerning considering that, according to the city's own data, demand for after-school programs is increasing, with participation up nearly three percent in the first four months of FY24, compared to the previous year.<sup>12</sup>

A lauded program that was never actually funded by the previous administration, is addressing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> <u>https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> <u>https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/

https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/after-school/comprehensive-after-school-system-of-new-york-citycompass.page

https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/03/21/after-school-cuts-to-compass-explore-and-sonyc-due-to-er ic-adams-budget-cuts/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/after-school/schools-out-new-york-city-sonyc.page

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2024/dycd.pdf</u>

homelessness for TGNCNBI and LGB youth. NYC can work to help protect young people most vulnerable to homelessness and exploitation for basic necessities. This administration should also commit to establishing housing vouchers for LGBTQ+ youth, a service proposed by the de Blasio administration but never actualized. TGNCNBI youths' needs have historically been neglected based on the city's past budgets. Even though there has been an increasing gap of homelessness, poverty, and pipeline to incarceration for those within the TGNCNBI community, the budget does not equally increase to reduce these gaps. Funding in the amount of \$1.25 million would provide the means to launch a housing voucher/rental assistance program catered to LGBTQ+ homeless youth under 24. This initiative is a partnership between the city and the Ali Forney Center; with additional funding, the city could also assist LGBTQ+ adults ages 25-30 by partnering with other organizations that provide housing services such as Destination Tomorrow, Princess Janae Place, and GLITS.

Young people are the future of our city, and this budget should be a celebration of the resiliency they have shown over the course of this pandemic. I look forward to working with this administration and this council to ensure that we are prioritizing and supporting youth and young adults.

Thank you.



## OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

### **ANTONIO REYNOSO**

Brooklyn Borough President

## City Council Committee on Children and Youth Hearing on the FY25 Preliminary Budget 3.22.24

Good morning Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth and thank you for holding this hearing today. I am here today to represent Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso and to thank you on his behalf for your continued support of the essential programs our children, families, and most marginalized groups across the city need to thrive.

With unpredictable cuts and large budget gaps across agencies due to expiring COVID Relief funds, FY25's Preliminary Budget sends a concerning message to New Yorkers. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) was hit with November PEGs, including reductions to: 3,538 highly coveted and necessary COMPASS slots, legal services, recreational events, youth services coordination, and even Summer Rising's Friday programming for middle schoolers – all of which are counterproductive to this administration's work to reduce crime and provide opportunities for our youth. Overall, this administration's approach to addressing a self-imposed budget crisis is inconsistent with the Council's and IBO's forecasted \$3.3 billion surplus for FY25.

Borough President Reynoso is particularly concerned about cuts to the following initiatives:

## **Summer Rising**

Summer Rising has become a popular program that provides fun and enriching experiences for our youth, keeping them safe and off the streets in the summer. While Borough President Reynoso was pleased to see the administration restore cuts to DOE's share of the program, a \$19.6M gap still exists for DYCD's share for FY25 and outyears. The cuts impact Friday programming, which will force middle school students and their families to pay out-of-pocket for other opportunities, or worse, leave students without the opportunity for productive activities. Given the documented benefits of programs like this, we shouldn't have to fight for them every year. Borough President Reynoso encourages the administration to baseline funding for Summer Rising so that every student who wants to participate has the opportunity.

Additionally, the administration should address the ongoing issues between the providers and the administrating agencies. As you, Chair Stevens, have highlighted several times, Summer Rising providers do not feel that they are equal partners in this collaboration. This echoes the Borough President's testimony last year, as well as concerns that providers continue to share with our office. They report that poor communication from DOE has resulted in confusion from parents about enrollment, sometimes leaving parents scrambling to find childcare, and that some matches between providers and schools have ignored existing relationships. An August 2023 Chalkbeat <u>article</u> also reported a wide variation in

program quality. The answer to these issues is not more cuts; rather, it is giving providers more support in developing programs that are both educational and fun.

### After- and Out-of-School Opportunities

It is also unfortunate to see cuts to after- and out-of-school opportunities that provide enrichment and promote pathways to employment for thousands of NYC youth, and disappointing that we have to fight for these programs seemingly every year. The Borough President stands with the Council in their calls to restore and baseline sustainable funding for the initiatives outlined below:

- COMPASS: The COMPASS program provides students in elementary through high school with access to after-school programs including a variety of activities. As mentioned, such programs provide critical opportunities for our youth to spend time productively, and for working parents to save on the cost of childcare. Yet the administration proposes reducing COMPASS seats by 3,538 slots annually in 2025-2027, on top of cuts already made in the November PEG. They cite underutilization as the reason for these cuts; however, providers report sustaining cuts even though they have waitlists for their existing seats.
- **Precision Employment Program.** The Precision Employment Initiative, connecting at-risk youth with green job opportunities, has served over 1,700 students since 2021 and was expanded in FY23 with an <u>investment from this administration of \$54M</u>. The Mayor, Speaker, Borough President Reynoso, and several other State and City electeds applauded this commitment and its targeted impact on communities such as Brownsville, East New York, Flatbush and East Flatbush.
- Summer Youth Employment Program Metrocards: The City Council successfully fought for free Metrocards for SYEP participants; however, this administration aims to undermine this effort with a failure to fund the full need in FY25.
- Work-based Learning Internships: Funding of \$714K should be baselined for this City Council initiative, which provides youth with opportunities in a wide array of industries, including pathways to high-paying and quality careers.

### **Youth Homelessness**

According to the Mayors Management Report, DYCD's Runaway and Homelessness Crisis Centers served 780 people in the first four months of FY23, an increase of 5% compared to the previous year. Additionally, their Drop-In Centers served 1,720 youth and young adults in the first four months of FY24, an increase of 19% from the same period in FY23. These increases represent a real need for these services, yet the administration is proposing 1.96M in cuts. These services are particularly critical for <u>LGBTQ youth</u> and other marginalized populations. It is difficult to see how this cut will not negatively impact programs, services, beds offered, and hours of operation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. Borough President Reynoso looks forward to working with the Council throughout the budget process to ensure that DYCD and ACS have the resources they need to provide our youth with robust opportunities for success.

Advocates for Children of New York Protecting every child's right to learn

## Testimony to be Delivered to the New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing: Children and Youth

## Re: Promise NYC - Early Childhood Education & Care for Children who are Undocumented

## March 22, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the need for continued funding for Promise NYC. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the education system, starting from the time children are born.

The first five years of a child's life are a period of rapid brain development that is foundational for a child's ability to learn. As such, we believe that every child should have access to high-quality early childhood care and education programs. We were pleased when the City launched Promise NYC last year to increase access to early childhood programs for children who are undocumented and appreciate the City Council's efforts to secure this funding. Unfortunately, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not include funding to continue this crucial initiative, and hundreds of children risk being turned away from their program after June.

Many child care and preschool programs, including New York City Public Schools' Infant & Toddler programs, as well as 3-K and Pre-K programs that offer extended hours, require families to qualify for subsidized child care assistance in order to enroll. These programs have historically excluded children who are undocumented as they are not eligible for this subsidy based on state and federal restrictions.

Since its launch in January 2023, hundreds of families of children who are undocumented have been able to secure child care funding through Promise NYC to

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attend a variety of early childhood programs. Thanks to the program, children have benefitted from safe, high-quality programs that prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond while their parents have been able to work and connect with resources. Unfortunately, this funding is set to expire in June, meaning that children risk losing a seat in their program and new families will be unable to apply.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the City allocated \$10 million, which served approximately 600 children for half the year—from January to June 2023. Last year, the City allocated just \$16 million for the entire fiscal year, instead of the \$20 million requested. For Fisal Year 2025, as demand continues to grow, we recommend that the City allocate and baseline \$20 million in the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) budget for Promise NYC.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.



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## Testimony Submitted by Steven Morales, NY Policy Director of All Our Kin for the Preliminary Budget Hearing New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth March 22, 2024

Honorable Chair Stevens and Members of the Children & Youth Committee,

My name is Steven Morales and I'm the New York Policy Director at All Our Kin. All Our Kin is a nonprofit organization that trains, supports, and sustains over 300 family child care educators who operate licensed child care programs in their homes, serving over 4,000 children.

I want to talk about child care – and specifically from the lens of licensed family child care educators who operate home-based child care businesses. This is a group of over 6,000 programs, educating over 80,000 children daily in our city, who often get overlooked in our broader early care and education landscape.

To that end, earlier this week, we had the opportunity to testify at the Education hearing chaired by CM Joseph. We talked about the importance of fully funding our early childhood education system, which includes 3K and Pre-K as well as programs administered by ACS and HRA.

I want to reiterate that call here because, despite being separated across multiple agencies, it is essential that we treat our city's birth through five early childhood programs as a single unified continuum. This is about investing in our children and the people who care for them so that our city can continue to be a place where all families, especially working class families, can thrive.

So first and foremost, our primary ask today is simple – **commit to ensuring that every child from birth through age five has access to early care and education in the setting of their family's choice.** That must include licensed family child care programs, which is where nearly half of our city's families using child care assistance vouchers choose to send their youngest children.

Our full set of recommendations is in our written testimony, so I want to draw attention to a few key items that fall under the jurisdiction of ACS and this committee:

## 1. Raise voucher pay rates for family child care providers to the maximum state



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**reimbursement rate.** The federal government has recently clarified that payments to providers do not need to be limited to what providers charge to private paying families. ACS should use this budget as an opportunity to immediately raise all voucher payments to the maximum allowable reimbursement rate under federal regulations. This is a simple way to bolster the earnings of our early childhood workforce.

## 2. Expand access to child care for families by:

- **Implementing presumptive eligibility** which is a simple way to ensure that families can begin receiving child care assistance soon after submitting their application without waiting weeks and even months for their documents to be reviewed and approved. This is permitted by both state and federal law and has already been successfully implemented in Monroe County, we just need to ensure that ACS is able to dedicate funds for this purpose.
- **Renewing and expanding funds for Promise NYC:** PromiseNYC has been a wildly successful program to offer child care to undocumented children. Last year, PromiseNYC was funded at \$16M which did not meet the full demand for the program. The Council must ensure that PromiseNYC is funded for at least \$20M for FY25.

Early childhood education must be a priority for our city and family child care plays an essential role in our early care and education system. Rather than cutting these crucial programs, it is time for the city to double down on its investment in early childhood education for the long term health and sustainability of our families, children, and educators.

We also ask that you consider All Our Kin's full <u>Legislative Agenda for Family Child Care in</u> <u>New York City</u>:

**Family child care is an essential piece of New York City's early care and education system.** Family child care — paid child care that takes place in the home of a licensed provider — is one of the most common child care arrangements in New York City. There are roughly 6,000 family child care programs in New York City, which account for nearly 37 percent of licensed child care capacity for children from birth to age five. Thirty-eight percent of children under five in subsidized care in New York City are in family child care programs.

**Family child care needs policy champions in New York City.** Despite their critical role supporting our city's children, families, communities, and economy, family child care programs have been systematically under-resourced and undervalued in policy and practice. Family child



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care educators are trained professional educators and business owners who ensure that children and families have the foundation they need to succeed, yet they are among the bottom three percent of earners in the workforce. At the same time, too many parents struggle to afford child care as they navigate the increasingly high cost of living in this city. It is up to policymakers to make sure our children, families, and child care educators can continue to make New York City their home.

All Our Kin envisions a New York City where all families have access to high-quality child care in the setting of their choice. Children should have the opportunity to spend their days in nurturing, educational environments, and family child care educators must be well-compensated and supported for the important work they do.

All Our Kin urges the New York City Council to take the following actions to sustain the family child care workforce, make it easier for families to access care and promote high-quality learning.

1. Ensure family child care professionals, including primary educators and assistants, earn enough to support and sustain their families. Family child care programs are closing their doors because educators, including those paid by the Administration for Children's Services, Human Resources Administration and Department of Education, are not adequately compensated for the professional early care and education they provide to our city's youngest children. After paying their child care business expenses, the average family child care educator in New York City earns only \$10.61 per hour. Increasing compensation for family child care is the most important step our city can take to turn the tide on closures and maintain and expand child care access for families.

**City Council leaders should:** invest city dollars in permanent wage supplement grants to all regulated family child care programs; ensure equitable distribution of existing city investments in early childhood education; and advocate to state policymakers to increase New York State's Child Care Assistance Program payment rates to meet the true cost of care.

2. Invest in comprehensive healthcare and retirement benefits for all family child care educators and assistants. As small businesses, family child care educators and their staff often lack access to the affordable and comprehensive health insurance and retirement plans they need for their physical and financial well-being. Ensuring access to benefits is



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also a key to retaining educators in the field for the long-term. Washington D.C., Washington State, and California have shown it is possible for cities and states to invest in these essential resources for educators.

**City Council leaders should** offer family child care educators comprehensive health insurance and retirement savings plans to help them stay in the field while caring for themselves and their own families.

3. Reimagine and reinvest in staffed family child care networks to ensure educators have access to high-quality training and resources. Staffed family child care networks are a research-based way to support quality, sustainability, and community among family child care educators. New York City's existing family child care networks hold the potential to give educators what they need to thrive, but insufficient funding and a complex web of requirements have forced networks and educators to spend more time on compliance than on the quality activities that we know work.

**City Council leaders should** engage family child care educators, parents, and network leaders to reimagine what family child care networks offer educators in NYC so that everyone has access to the training, coaching, and support they need. The Council must also ensure family child care networks are adequately funded to hire the staff they need to effectively implement all of their essential functions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Steven Morales steven@allourkin.org





## AAFE Testimony to the Committee on Children and Youth Friday, March 22, 2024

Good afternoon. My name is Emily Rios and I'm the managing director of community services at Asian Americans for Equality, known as AAFE.

Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for your support of vital youth programs across our city that enable young people to lay foundations for greater economic mobility, including the immigrant youth served by AAFE Youth.

AAFE Youth provides a comprehensive array of youth development services to empower our next generation of community leaders and changemakers. These include youth leadership, college readiness and application assistance, and career development. Our programming is multilingual in capacity, including Spanish and multiple dialects of Chinese. Our students are as diverse as the borough we call home, and face unique challenges as low-income, immigrant youth.

Each year, approximately 450 high school-aged youth from across Queens directly enroll in one of AAFE's youth programs, on-site at our Downtown Flushing Youth Center. These include our COMPASS program for 9th and 10th graders, and our CASTLE program for 11th and 12th graders. An additional 200 students benefit from our in-school college counseling services. We're proud to maintain a 100% college acceptance and matriculation rate.

I'd like to share with you some words from a budding young leader and longtime youth participant, Hannah. She writes, "AAFE Youth is a community that is very welcoming to everyone, and there are many events that are free for you to join and make new memories. AAFE Youth allows you to be yourself, and learn more about the world outside such as college, jobs, and volunteer opportunities."

Our impact is ever-growing as we tirelessly work to meet increasing demand for our services. All these incredible metrics and life-changing experiences for youth that I've shared with you are made possible by just 3 full-time staff and 1 supervisor.





We are here today to urge the much-needed, bolstered support of our work. Our funding streams are inconsistent and insufficient to sustain the outcomes we're producing. We annually operate with a funding gap of \$140,000 that we must piece together outside of our City contracts. Our CASTLE program has gone unfunded from the City for a number of years despite how crucial it is in setting our underserved youth upon paths to higher education and employment. Still, we retain and even grow the program because we are committed to our work.

Despite these funding challenges, we persist in providing our services with the utmost care for the futures of our youth. We ask that you ensure our bright, inspiring students can continue to call AAFE Youth their second home. Thank you for your time.

## The New York City Council

## FY 25 Preliminary Budget Hearing

## Committee on Finance Jointly with the Committee on Children and Youth

## Friday March 22, 2024

## **Testimony of Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez**

Good afternoon. Special thanks to Finance Chair Brannan and Children and Youth Committee Chair Althea Stevens for hosting this meeting and to all of you for your support of youth development. My name is Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez and I am the Chief Executive Officer of The Greater New York Councils, Boy Scouts of America. We are a local Scout council that serves the five boroughs of NYC, working with close to 9,000 children and youth of all genders ages 5-20. We offer 416 community-based Scouting and Exploring programs citywide to help young people succeed in school, career, and life. Close to 50% of our participants in our outreach programs are female, over 70% of our participants are children of color, and a majority of students receive financial assistance. Members build life skills and self-esteem, propelling them to take on new challenges and overcome obstacles.

Our Cub Scouts programs for children in grades 1-5 teach life skills, STEM, environmental stewardship, personal responsibility, and fitness. Members attend weekend activities and camping trips. We have volunteer-led programs citywide. Additionally, we offer our Scoutreach afterschool program, where we hire college students to serve as paid program leaders in under-resourced communities. This program serves 1,300 students in grades one through five in 14 school programs in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan and has been replicated nationally.



Middle school and high school students can join Scouts BSA, where we emphasize leadership opportunities and offer merit badges in a wide variety of academic and career-focused subjects.

And our Exploring program offers worksite-based exposure and mentoring to over 2,600 middle and high school age students in high growth sectors such as construction, finance, law and law enforcement, and healthcare. Our largest partnership is with the NYPD, where we have posts at every precinct in NYC. In addition to preparing young people for potential career opportunities, Exploring also teaches critical life skills including communications, leadership and a sense of responsibility.

All Scouts and Explorers can experience outdoor adventure at our three iconic camps, in Staten Island, Alpine NJ, and Narrowsburg, NY. They learn CPR, First Aid, and Swimming. They sleep outdoors for the first time, scale new heights in our climbing programs, and gain confidence to take on new challenges. They learn to work as a team.

Our positive youth development approach works:

- Scouts are TWICE as likely to get a bachelor's degree and TWICE as likely to get an advanced degree than non-Scouts.
- Scouts from low-income families are more likely to make almost DOUBLE the income as their peers.

Research has also shown the positive impact of Law Enforcement Exploring. In one study, Explorers had higher **school attendance graduation** rates, and **Regents Diploma** rates than their peers.



Exploring also enhances career opportunities. For example, **64% of Exploring** alumni reported having a job in the career sector of their former Post.

Finally, Law Enforcement Exploring has also been shown to strengthen relationships between youth and law enforcement, building bridges of trust in the community to improve public safety for all.

When youth programs are under-funded, we shortchange our present and future. We appreciate your strong advocacy for funding for youth afterschool programs to build a better future.



## **Testimony of the Article 10 Family Defense Organizations:**

## Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, Center for Family Representation, and Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

**Presented Before** 

The New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

## Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget Hearing

## March 22, 2024

This testimony is submitted jointly by the Bronx Defenders (BxD), Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), Center for Family Representation (CFR) and the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) (collectively the "family defense organizations"). Our offices are the primary providers of mandated legal representation to parents who are eligible for free representation in Article 10 cases filed in family court in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Together, we have created a nationally recognized model of interdisciplinary representation for parents charged with neglect or abuse and at risk of family separation and termination of their parental rights. Our model, which provides comprehensive representation to indigent parents through teams of attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates, has been recognized as the most effective model of representation of its kind.<sup>1</sup> Together, we have prevented thousands of children from needlessly entering and languishing in the foster system and have reduced the foster system census in New York City by over 50%<sup>2</sup>. This translates to nearly \$40 million in annual savings in foster system expenditures for New York City<sup>3</sup>, and the preservation of family bonds that are priceless to our clients, their children, and society at large. We thank the Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the critical services our agencies provide to low-

<sup>1</sup>See Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore 27-28 (February 2019); see also Martin Guggenheim & Susan Jacobs, A New National Movement in Parent Representation, 47 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 44, 45 (2013), available at <u>https://cfrny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-New-National-Movement-in-Parent-Representation-Clearinghouse-Review.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Martin Guggenheim and Susan Jacobs, *Providing Parents Multidsciplinary Legal Representation* Significantly Reduces Children's Time in Foster Care, American Bar Association (June 3, 2019), available at <u>https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\_interest/child\_law/resources/child\_law\_practiceonline/january---</u> december-2019/providing-parents-multidisciplinary-legal-representation-signifi/

income New Yorkers and the need to ensure that these services are fully funded to ensure their effectiveness.

The family defense offices have followed the leadership of directly-impacted people and adopted the phrase "family regulation system" or "family policing system" to describe what has traditionally been called the "child welfare system" or the "child protection system," to reflect the system's prioritization of and roots in surveillance, punishment, and control rather than genuine assistance to and support of families living in poverty.<sup>4</sup> The primary goal of our work is to provide high quality legal representation to parents in high-stakes family regulation cases and ameliorate the underlying systemic barriers that drive families into this system, such as lack of access to quality health and mental health treatment, material supports and appropriate education and services for children with disabilities. We also aim to reduce the harm of the consequences of system involvement, such as criminal charges, housing and income loss, education issues and inability to adjust immigration status. Collectively we represent thousands of parents each year. Since 2007 when New York City first contracted with family defense organizations to represent parents, we have represented more than 50,000 parents in family court, touching the lives of close to 110,000 children, the vast majority of whom are Black and Brown and live in the most marginalized, low-income communities in New York City.

Since fiscal year 2020, we have also provided two critical services to low-income parents, in addition to our mandated legal representation in court, made possible only with City Council funding of the **Right to Family Advocacy Project** through the Family Advocacy and Guardianship Support Initiative:

- **Early defense:** We provide support, guidance, and legal representation to parents during an investigation by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), with the primary goal of preventing family separation and unnecessary family court filings.
- **SCR advocacy:** We provide legal representation in administrative proceedings to help parents clear or modify (amend or seal) their Statewide Central Register (SCR) records that result after ACS investigations, thereby preserving and expanding low-income New Yorkers' employment opportunities.

The City Council plays an important role in monitoring the provision of ACS services and in ensuring that the families affected by ACS involvement have legal representation that is adequately funded to achieve fair and positive outcomes for families. This testimony addresses the importance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See, Dorothy Roberts, *Abolishing Policing Also Means Abolishing Family Regulation*, The Imprint (June 16, 2020), <u>https://imprintnews.org/child-welfare-2/abolishing-policing-also-means-abolishing-family-regulation/44480</u>.

of adequately funding the City Council's Right to Family Advocacy Project and the family defense organizations' provision of legally mandated representation to parents charged with abuse and neglect in family court. Specifically:

• We ask the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project and increase the funding from \$2.6 million to \$3.3 million to increase capacity based on need and address increased costs.

• We seek adequate funding for Article 10 representation from both the city and state. To that end, we urge this Council to:

- 1. Ensure that New York City increases its funding for parent representation during the FY25 procurement process to allow our offices to meet state caseload standards.
- 2. Call on the Governor and New York State Legislature to rescind removing \$234 million from the Indigent Legal Services Fund that supports the state's public defender offices, including NYC's family defense organizations.
- 3. Call upon the Governor and Legislature to appropriate \$50 million in this year's budget for parental representation as requested by the Office of Indigent Legal Services and supported by Chief Judge Rowan Wilson.

# I. <u>Family Defense Offices Have Proven to be Highly Successful in Providing High Quality</u> <u>Legal Representation to Families and Reducing the Time Children Spend in the Foster</u> <u>System</u>

Family defense organizations play a pivotal role in fulfilling the city's legal obligation to provide legal representation in family court, in Article 10 and related cases, for parents unable to afford legal counsel. In the face of the catastrophic prospect of losing parental rights, these organizations not only provide essential legal guidance to safeguard these rights but also serve as a crucial bulwark for families facing the threat of separation, which disproportionately harms families of color. Through comprehensive, zealous advocacy and social service support, the preservation of family bonds takes precedence. This approach leads to a notable reduction in the time children spend in foster care, resulting in significant savings for the city.

# A. Providing high quality interdisciplinary representation to parents reduces the time children spend in the foster system and is a necessary counterweight to ACS, to protect due process rights and prevent unnecessary family separation.

In New York, parents charged with abuse or neglect in family court are legally entitled to legal representation if they cannot afford it, as mandated by statute and the New York State Constitution.<sup>5</sup> In 2007, New York City dramatically changed its parent representation system by contracting with multidisciplinary organizations. These organizations employ lawyers, social workers, parent advocates, and investigators with expertise spanning various legal fields such as housing, public benefits, mental health, criminal justice, educational law, and immigration defense.<sup>6</sup> Since then, our offices have represented the vast majority of parents in Article 10 proceedings and all related matters, including interim appeals, custody, visitation, family offense, paternity and Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) proceedings.

Over the last almost 17 years, our offices have honed family defense practices that serve as a state and national model, recognized as the most effective approach to advocacy for parents in family regulation cases.<sup>7</sup> The Commission on Parental Representation, established by Chief Judge DiFiore to examine the state of representation for indigent parents in New York State, issued an interim report in February 2019 following extensive hearings. It recommended the adoption of New York City's parent representation model in family regulation cases statewide. The Commission concluded that:

"[T]he best chance of successful implementation of its recommendations is through statewide expansion of institutional providers and attorneys specializing in child welfare law. The use of attorneys dedicated to, and proficient in, such representation would

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> New York has long recognized a parent's right to counsel in child protection proceedings. In a pioneering 1972 decision, *Matter of Ella B.*, 30 N.Y.2d 352, the New York Court of Appeals recognized the equal protection and due process right to indigent parents to assigned counsel in child neglect and abuse cases. Three years later, sections 261, 262, and 1120 of the Family Court Act codified a broad parental right to counsel. Additionally, numerous provisions throughout Article 10 of the Family Court Act address implementation of the parental right to counsel in child welfare proceedings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Our organizations were created following the findings and recommendations of government agencies regarding the widespread inadequacy of parent representation. As early as 2000, the NYC Public Advocate issued a report "Justice Denied: The Crisis in Legal Representation of Birth Parents in Child Protective Proceedings," detailing the inadequacy of legal representation in Article 10 cases in New York City. In 2006, Chief Judge Judith Kaye's Commission on the Future of Indigent Defense Services found family law representation so lacking that they went out of their way to point it out in a report focusing on criminal defense. The deficiencies for mandated indigent representation included excessive caseloads, insufficient salaries, inadequate office facilities, lack of sufficient funding for training, investigations, experts, social work and support staff as well as a marked disparity in resources between public legal service providers and local social services agencies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore 27-28 (February 2019); see also Martin Guggenheim & Susan Jacobs, A New National Movement in Parent Representation, 47 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 44, 45 (2013), available at <u>https://cfrny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-New-National-Movement-in-Parent-Representation-Clearinghouse-Review.pdf</u>.

improve the quality, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of parental representation statewide."8

The benefit of New York City's contract with family defense organizations to fulfill the mandate of parent representation cannot be overstated: our work dramatically reduces both the number of families separated by ACS, and the amount of time children spend in the foster system.<sup>9</sup> As the Council evaluates funding requests for the Administration for Children's Services, it is critical that our offices receive adequate funding to counterbalance the agency's tremendous reach and power. Our interdisciplinary model ensures protection of parents' due process and legal rights while holding ACS accountable to its obligations, preventing unnecessary family separations, and minimizing foster care stays.

Our offices actively litigate emergency hearings under Family Court Act §§ 1027 and 1028, to prevent children from entering the foster system unless absolutely necessary and, if they do, to minimize the time separated from their families. Throughout Article 10 cases, our interdisciplinary teams work tirelessly to achieve and maintain family reunification through advocacy at case conferences, active motion practice, investigation of the facts, and the litigation of fact finding, disposition, visitation, and permanency hearings. Adequate resourcing of interdisciplinary family defense representation is essential for ensuring that the court receives all information necessary to uphold the law in maintaining family relationships. The experience of institutional, holistic family defense over the past 16 and a half years in New York City has proven that zealous in-court representation combined with crucial advocacy and family support outside of court is the most powerful method to safeguard the rights of parents and children, ensuring fairness and effectiveness of the family regulation system.

Our effectiveness in reducing foster care involvement is well documented. The most comprehensive study of parental representation in family court ever conducted reveals that holistic, interdisciplinary institutional representation in New York City significantly reduces the time children spend in the foster system.<sup>10</sup> This study compared length of foster stays for the children represented by BxD, BDS, and CFR's with those of children whose parents who were assigned solo attorneys pursuant to Article 18-b of the County Law, Indigent Defense Legal Panel Plan. The findings indicate that representation by interdisciplinary offices reduced children's time in the foster system by nearly four months over the 48 months following the filing of the petition, leading to earlier reunification outcomes and translating into nearly \$40 million in annual savings

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore at 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Center for New York City Affairs, The New School, *Watching the Numbers: A Six-Year Statistical Survey Monitoring New York City's Child Welfare System* (November 2016), available at <a href="https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5849a22f725e254385d753eb/1481220657883/FINAL\_Watching+the+Numbers\_2016.pdf">https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5849a22f725e254385d753eb/1481220657883/FINAL\_Watching+the+Numbers\_2016.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See study at *https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074091930088X; see also Providing Parents Multidisciplinary Legal Representation Significantly Reduces Children's Time in Foster Care, by Martin Guggenheim & Susan Jacobs, June 4, 2019.* 

in foster system expenditures for New York City.<sup>11</sup> Of critical note, these outcomes were achieved without compromising the safety of children.<sup>12</sup>

# **B.** Most Article 10 cases stem from poverty and its related stressors, and families benefit from the support services the family defense providers offer.

More than 90 percent of our clients face allegations of neglect, not abuse. These cases typically stem from poverty-related issues, with allegations often including poor or unstable housing conditions, food insecurity, income instability, concerns about children's education attendance, domestic violence, excessive discipline, or inadequate childcare. Additionally, many of our clients struggle with untreated mental health and/or substance use disorders which are exacerbated by the stress of poverty, or confront other challenges, such as cognitive disabilities. A significant portion of our clients have experienced periods in the foster system during their childhood or are young parents currently navigating the foster system.

Despite the challenges our clients face, research and our experience demonstrate that most of these families suffer more trauma and deeper harm from being separated than from receiving support to remain unified. Family separation, even for short periods, inflicts significant short and long-term damage on children, a harm,<sup>13</sup> recognized by the state's highest court.<sup>14</sup> Prolonged separation subject children to extended and severe toxic stress provoked by a persistent fight-or-flight trauma response. If subjected to toxic stress continuously over an extended period, the damage inflicted on a child's brain becomes irreparable.<sup>15</sup> Even brief stays in the foster system can impair a child's ability to form attachments, regulate emotions, develop health coping mechanisms, nurture decision-making skills, manage self-regulation, and maintain healthy relationships.<sup>16</sup> Quality representation for parents is essential to prevent unnecessary and traumatic family separation while also promptly reuniting families, and ensuring that beneficial, family strengthening services are in place. As a result of our representation, many of our clients' families remain intact during legal proceedings allowing parents, children, and families to access the life-affirming support they need.

Less than 10 percent of our cases involve more serious allegations of abuse, often resulting in immediate removal of children from their families. These cases are among the most complex,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *Id*.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Shanta Trivedi, *The Harm of Child Removal*, 43 New York University Review of Law & Social Change 523 (2019).. Vivek Sankaran. "A Cure Worse Than the Disease? The Impact of Removal on Children and Their Families." Christopher Church and Monique Mitchell, co-authors. *Marq. L. Rev.* 102, no. 4 (2019): 1163-94.
 <sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Matter of Jamie J., 30 N.Y.3d 275, 280 n.1 (2017); Nicholson v. Scopetta, 3 N.Y.3d 357 (N.Y. 2004).

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Brain Development, at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVwFkcOZHJw&feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVwFkcOZHJw&feature=youtu.be</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Vivek Sankaran, co-author. "Easy Come, Easy Go: The Plight of Children Who Spend Less Than 30 Days in Foster Care." Christopher Church, U. Pa. J. L. & Soc. Change 19, no. 3 (2016): 207-237.

requiring extensive litigation, expert testimony, and thorough investigations to demonstrate innocence, provide medical explanations for apparent injuries, or present mitigating factors. In instances of such complexity, our responsibility to safeguard the due process rights of families escalates, demanding the expertise and passion of our highly qualified and experienced attorneys to litigate these intricate, high stakes claims effectively.

# C. Interdisciplinary representation reduces the harm of structural racism inherent in the foster system.

The foster system starkly disproportionately punishes, controls, surveils, and forcibly separates low-income Black and Brown families. Just as our modern police systems descend from slave patrols, the family regulation system is deeply rooted in our country's history of separating Indigenous, Black, and low-income children from their families.

The family regulation system's origins are in the separation of enslaved Black children and parents to profit from their labor, and in the government-supported separation of indigenous children from their parents meant to destroy the Indigenous communities whose land the government was seeking to colonize. The system continued with "Orphan Trains" of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when The Children's Aid Society, still in operation in New York City today, separated thousands of poor Italian and Irish immigrant children from their families, and sent those children to the Midwest to work in indentured servitude. Family connections in impacted communities were considered inferior and therefore breaking those connections was considered to their, and more importantly, to society's benefit.

The family regulation system that ensnares families today is rooted in this history, but its funding did not explode until public assistance programs were slashed in the 1980s and 1990s in response to Black families demanding equal access to social programs through the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. These cuts were coupled with billions of dollars in new funding for the foster system. In 1981, the federal foster system budget stood at less than \$500 million; today, it stands at nearly \$10 billion. With this huge increase in funding, family regulation agencies targeted the Black community, using the same racist and classist ideology motivating the war on drugs and the cuts to public assistance. In New York City today, for every white child in the foster system, there are 13.2 Black children and 6.2 Hispanic children.

Research from all corners, from the Federal Children's Bureau to the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges to numbers reported by ACS itself, demonstrates that Indigenous, Black and Brown families are disproportionately represented in reports, investigations, and prosecutions by the family regulation system and that Indigenous, Black and Brown children are disproportionately represented in the foster system. This is not the work of a few bad apples. These outcomes, demonstrated reliably and consistently across a variety of social science research, are a result of structural racism masquerading as social betterment. An internal ACS racial equity audit "described a 'predatory system that specifically targets Black and brown parents' and subjects them to 'a different level of scrutiny<sup>17</sup>.""

When the communities we represent are investigated by ACS, caseworkers often use misinformation and the threat of family separation and police involvement to coerce vulnerable families to relinquish their constitutional rights before a court is even involve<sup>18</sup>. Hospitals target pregnant low-income Black and Brown parents to drug test them without consent, regardless of whether there are any actual child safety concerns, a legacy of the now-debunked racist "crack baby" myth. The family regulation system has become a weapon used by landlords seeking to harass tenants, jilted lovers, and vengeful family members by allowing anonymous reports to be filed with little accountability, leaving families to pick up the pieces after the resulting intrusive investigations.

All these processes create a dynamic that entangles low-income Black and Brown families into a system that, often, tears them apart. For the people who find themselves in these horrifying circumstances, their attorney is the lifeline to bring their children home, which is why our services are critical and must be properly resourced and supported by the city.

# **D.** The family defense model provides consistent high-quality representation for parents through the following key elements:

**Interdisciplinary practice:** Our interdisciplinary approach, treating lawyers, social workers, paralegals, and system-impacted parent advocates as equal partners in client-centered representation, is fundamental to our success. Parent advocates, often parents with lived experience in the child welfare system, serve as "credible messengers", offering invaluable peer-to-peer support to parents navigating the family regulation system. Social work and parent advocate support play a pivotal role in addressing our clients' complex needs, providing crucial assistance both inside and outside the courtroom. From the initial court appearance, social workers and parent advocates guide clients through various services, such as domestic violence shelter placement, family therapy, education consultants, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, crucial for preventing family separation. Paralegals play a vital role in assisting attorneys with legal filings, organizing discovery materials, drafting subpoenas, handling appeals, and managing client intake.

Our collaborative team of social workers, parent advocates, attorneys and clients work closely together to develop legal strategies and service plans tailored to the client's goals and family needs. Unlike ACS caseworkers, our parent advocates and social workers center parental involvement in finding solutions for their families, emphasizing support rather than separation.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Andy Newman, Is N.Y.'s Child Welfare System Racist? Some of Its Own Workers Say Yes., *New York Times*, (Nov. 22, 2022), available at https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/nyregion/nyc-acs-racism-abuse-neglect.html
 <sup>18</sup> Eli Hager, Police Need Warrants to Search Homes. Child Welfare Agents Almost Never Get One, ProPublica (Oct. 13, 2022), available at https://www.propublica.org/article/child-welfare-search-seizure-without-warrants

Social workers perform comprehensive and on-going family assessments to identify needs and ensure appropriate services and interventions are implemented. They advocate for clients at ACS and foster-care agency conferences, maintaining continuity between courtroom advocacy, agency practices, and clients' evolving circumstances.

A critical role of our social work and parent advocate teams is building trusting relationships with clients and amplifying their voices outside of court. They attend ACS and foster agency conferences across the five boroughs to advocate for appropriate visitation and service plans aligned with each family's needs, facilitating family reunification. Utilizing their deep understanding of each client's situation and their knowledge of New York's social services landscape, our out-of-court staff connect parents with necessary resources and assist with navigating the shelter and benefits systems. Social workers also mediate and resolve issues that can arise between clients and ACS, foster agency workers, foster parents, and/or service providers.

Our offices develop close relationships with community-based programs serving New York's immigrant communities, ensuring clients have access to culturally competent service providers and language-appropriate services. For clients ineligible for medical insurance, our social workers identify programs offering no-fee services.

**Supervisory structure:** Our supervisory structure is critical to maintaining the quality of our representation and facilitating efficient court operations. This structure prioritizes accountability, ensuring that our staff delivers high quality representation and operates with efficiency to meet client goals. Supervisors play a crucial role in upholding quality standards through both in-court and out-of-court supervision, meticulously reviewing legal filings, preparing for trial, and conducting performance evaluations. With a deep understanding of clients' cases, supervisors are poised to address emergencies, cover hearings, conferences, or motions; and ensure continuity through staff transitions. Moreover, our supervisory structure serves as a platform for clients and stakeholders to provide feedback on staff performance, reinforcing our commitment to a client-centered approach and continuous improvement.

**Training of staff:** Our comprehensive and rigorous training equips new staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high quality representation in the complex and high-stakes area of family law right from the outset. We offer extensive training programs tailored for new attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates encompassing all aspects of Article 10 proceedings. This includes both the substantive legal aspects and practical litigation skills essential for high-quality, effective representation. Additionally, our offices collaborate to organize regular workshops and training sessions, aimed at advancing staff members' professional growth, cultural awareness, racial competency, and further refining their substantive knowledge and skills.

**Language access:** Our offices prioritize recruiting staff from diverse backgrounds and linguistic abilities, recognizing the significant advantages clients gain from working with staff who speak their primary language. Bilingual staff not only facilitate clear communication but can also

establish meaningful connections with community-based agencies that understand the cultural or religious considerations that often play a role in Article 10 cases. Attorneys who can communicate and meaningfully connect with clients in their preferred language not only strengthen the attorneyclient relationship but also markedly enhance the quality of representation<sup>19</sup>. Complex legal information is more accessible and understandable when communicated in a client's primary or preferred language, further empowering them to make informed decisions about their case. And for any clients who require translation in a language where we do not have staff for translation, our teams have access to telephonic interpretation services.

**Specialized expertise in substantive areas:** Over time our offices have identified attorneys and social work staff who specialize in particular areas of law or practice, thus cultivating expertise and institutional knowledge. This strategic approach enhances the quality of representation and boosts the efficiency of our practice. Our team members excel in various areas, including appeals, custody, Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), education, immigration, and medically complex matters.

**Motion practice:** Our offices leverage our wealth of institutional knowledge to great advantage through our robust motion practice. We improve efficiency by maintaining databases containing model briefs and motions, which serve as valuable resources for our attorneys. These models provide a solid foundation for engaging in vigorous motion practice in settled and emerging areas of the law. Particularly for clients seeking to reunify with their children, our motion practice plays a crucial role in propelling the process forward. Attorneys routinely file motions to compel ACS to provide our clients with essential services, including those in their primary language, and to facilitate increased visitation. Additionally, for clients whose children are home and who face meritless neglect allegations, or where court intervention is no longer necessary, we file motions seeking dismissal. We also file motions to terminate supervision in cases where families have successfully completed services and no longer pose safety concerns or require court oversight. Our highly skilled motion practice significantly expedites case resolutions and accelerates the reunification process.

**Intake:** Through each offices' interdisciplinary intake teams of attorneys, social workers, and other advocates, clients have access to comprehensive resources right from the outset of their case. Our proactive approach has the dual benefit of addressing clients' immediate needs while preparing us to swiftly respond to emergency hearings which can arise as soon as the following day. Prior to the pandemic, our initial interactions with clients took place in person at family court where we were afforded time to conduct thorough interviews and guide them through the legal process. This personal connection allowed the clients to quickly develop trust, reassured by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Jayesh M. Rathod, *The Transformative Potential of Attorney Bilingualism*, 46 U. Michigan J. Law Reform 863-920 (2013).

firsthand experience of our skill as passionate and competent advocates with stellar reputations in the courtroom.

While current protocols anticipate that intake occurs in person, most parents rarely attend initial hearings in person. Our clients report that some ACS caseworkers advise them that physical appearance at court is unnecessary and to instead attend remotely. Unfortunately, this guidance overlooks a crucial opportunity for clients to meet their legal team in person and begin to establish a basis of trust. As a result, the responsibility of coordinating in-person court appearances falls to our staff, often resulting in challenges from outdated contact information or unanswered calls. These hurdles significantly impede our ability to establish trust and rapport, ultimately hampering our capacity to gather important information that is essential to effective advocacy.

**Technology/data that provides accountability:** Our offices have online case management systems, developed, and improved over many years, enabling our offices to produce data on client demographics and court procedures and outcomes for the city, ensuring accountability. These systems also allow staff members to access up-to-date information on cases, enhancing our ability to respond to frequent emergencies, and enable our attorneys and out-of-court advocates to share information about cases. Our relationship with the court has allowed us to access court data as well, which enhances our ability to advise clients and ensure our records are updated.

**Collaborations with the court and other stakeholders:** Our offices are actively engaged in various collaborations with the court and stakeholders within the family regulation system, aiming to enhance efficiency within the court system, amplify the voices of system-impacted parents, and improve outcomes for children and families. We regularly convene with court personnel to address shared concerns and ensure the effective operation of family court. We maintain ongoing and productive collaborations with ACS and attorneys for the children to achieve several objectives. These include reducing the unnecessary removal of children from their homes without court orders, expanding visitation between separated parents and children, improving access to housing assistance for ACS-involved families, designing and implementing fair and effective guidelines for assisting parents affected by mental illness, enhancing access to services in their primary language. Through these collaborations, we strive to create a more supportive and equitable environment for parents, children, and the entire family involved in the family regulation system.

Leveraging pro bono and law school and social work resources: Our offices expand our limited resources by partnering with major New York City law firms, which serve as co-counsel on some of our most complex cases. Additionally, clinics from law and social work schools in New York City significantly enhance the efficiency of our practices by providing additional resources to support the work of our attorneys and social workers.

# II. City Council Should Continue to Support for the Right to Family Advocacy Project

The Right to Family Advocacy Project, funded through the City Council's Family Advocacy and Guardianship Support Initiative, is a crucial support system for parents and caregivers navigating the complex, traumatic family regulation system. By providing vital legal and social work representation at two pivotal stages, this initiative is a lifeline to families in need:

- 1. During an ACS investigation, the project strengthens family stability, avoids court intervention, and crucially prevents family separation.
- 2. In administrative proceedings to amend and seal parents' and caregivers' records with the State Central Register, the project fosters expanded employment opportunities and economic stability for already vulnerable and marginalized families.

This project provides desperately needed due process protections and advocacy, particularly for the predominantly Black and Brown families disproportionately targeted by the family regulation system. Without this initiative, many of these families would face the loss of their children and the permanent fracture of their family without access to legal counsel - a glaring injustice that the City Council's funding is necessary to begin to rectify.

**Our organizations are requesting \$3.3 million (\$825,000 each) for FY25.** City Council funding for the Right to Family Advocacy Project is paramount. These essential services are not funded through our Article 10 contracts with MOCJ. With this in mind, we request \$3.3 million (\$825,000 per organization) for FY25. This increase from the current \$650,000 per organization will enable us to meet the needs of a greater number of impacted families while also accommodating rising costs, including salaries, OTPS, health insurance, and space expenses. This support is not just an investment in families - it's an investment in justice, equity, and the future well-being of the communities we serve.

# A. Low-income parents do not have access to counsel during ACS investigations, but this project provides access to counsel through our organizations.

Currently, parents embroiled in family regulation matters, unable to afford legal representation, are not provided attorneys until ACS files an abuse or neglect case against them in family court. Yet, critical decisions with far-reaching consequences are made before a case reaches the courtroom. These decisions can have generational consequences, determining whether families will be directed to prevention programs, whether cases will proceed to court, and, most significantly, whether children will be separated from their parents and, if so, who will care for them. Without access to counsel during this crucial investigative phase of an Article 10 case, parents are left to engage with ACS alone, make pivotal decisions impacting their family's integrity, address allegations against them, and navigate state intervention without formal support. In stark contrast, ACS enjoys legal representation throughout their investigations.

Because families are too often separated by the family regulation system, the Commission on Parental Legal Representation established in 2018 by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore recommended that parents be granted access to counsel during a child protective investigation<sup>20</sup>.

"Giving parents representation when it matters – before they appear in court - is consistent with principles of equal protection and due process; can prevent unnecessary and prolonged separation of children from their parents; and can mitigate the disruption and trauma that accompanies State intervention into the family. Timely access to counsel may also help reduce the disproportionate percentage of children of color in New York's foster care system<sup>21</sup>."

In addition, the standards of practice for parents' attorneys, adopted by the American Bar Association in 2006, recommend that attorneys actively represent parents during an investigation<sup>22</sup>. Recently issued eligibility standards by ILS also recommended assigning counsel to parents during the investigation stage of a case. These standards were recently codified as a court rule by the Office of Court Administration. Fam. Ct. Rule 205.19. Representation at the investigation phase serves as a crucial and much needed bulwark against a multitude of avoidable harms to the low-income, predominantly Black and Brown families, who are most often the targets of the family regulation system.

This project of the City Council is a critical element in preserving family unity whenever possible. Our staff meet with parents, discuss allegations, explore potential solutions, and guide parents through the intrusive and often humiliating. Additionally, social workers funded by this project can facilitate the implementation of services, potentially dissuading ACS from filing a case altogether.

In all, this invaluable funding accomplishes much more than its face value, yielding far-reaching benefits that extend beyond mere reductions in court filings and child removals. It empowers individuals who are unjustly targeted by ACS, providing them with the support and resources they need to effectively navigate legal challenges that threaten the stability of their family.

# B. Low-income parents do not have access to counsel in SCR hearings and are unjustifiably denied opportunities in employment and to care for their relatives' children.

At the conclusion of an investigation, ACS determines whether the report should be "indicated," resulting in the parent or caretaker's name being placed on the State Central Registry (SCR). This

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge Defiore, 16 (February 2019), http://ww2.nycourts.gov/doc/15446

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See American Bar Association, Standards of Practice for Attorneys Representing Parents in Abuse and Neglect Cases 10 (2006), available at <u>https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\_law/aba-parent-rep-stds.pdf</u>

listing then precludes them from many employment opportunities, despite the fact that whether a case is indicated is not always subjected to external review because the case never undergoes judicial scrutiny with ACS held to a burden of proof. Indeed, the majority of indicated cases are never brought to court for review, yet the consequences are profound, lasting for decades and disproportionately impacting families of color.

In New York City, Black and Latinx children represent 88% of all SCR reports.<sup>23</sup> Unsurprisingly, given their gross overrepresentation in SCR reports, 48% of all indicated reports in New York City involve either Black or Latinx children.<sup>24</sup> When considering the rate of indication for children of color, including Asian/Pacific Islander and multiple races, a staggering 91% of indicated cases in New York City involve children of color. New York parents listed on the SCR are routinely denied employment as daycare workers, nannies, teaching assistants, substance abuse counselors, home health aides, medical supply delivery people, drivers for the disabled, an array of positions in hospitals, and more, based on unproven allegations of child abuse and neglect.<sup>25</sup> Black and Brown New Yorkers are disproportionately impacted by the loss of opportunity in these professions: eighty-five percent of care workers, such as nannies and health aids, are women of color.<sup>26</sup> SCR records, accessible to employers for years, severely limit parents' ability to secure employment that can provide economic stability for their families.

The ramifications extend far beyond employment, affecting custody determinations and kinship care arrangements. Courts frequently consider indicated reports from the SCR in custody determinations, often favoring parents without an indicated report. Moreover, an indicated report may pose risks for individuals seeking custody of children through kinship care—an alternative to the traditional foster system where relatives provide care. While kinship care is widely acknowledged as the next best option when parental care is unavailable, arrangements are often rejected based on indicated reports, even if the report is outdated. This situation forces children into foster placement with strangers, despite the availability of caring relatives.

Despite the existence of a process to challenge this outcome through hearings with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), parents generally lack access to counsel in these hearings necessary to amend or seal an indicated case from the SCR. Yet, ACS is always afforded the benefit of counsel during these hearings. Decisions in these hearings often hinge on the interpretation of statutory and legal terms, such as "person legally responsible," "collateral estoppel," and "dismissed on the merits." However, parents are not provided with an attorney to advise them of their right to challenge their listing on the SCR or to advocate on their behalf. In January 2022, the laws governing SCR hearings were overhauled, introducing a new legal standard

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> <u>https://familypolicynyc.org/report/scr/;</u> https://nysba.org/new-york-state-bar-association-finds-child-welfare-system-replete-with-systemic-racism-pushes-for-reforms/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2023/demographics-children-fy-2023.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See Nikita Stewart, The Child Abuse Charge Was Dismissed. But it Can Still Cost You a Job, N.Y. Times (Feb. 25, 2019), https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/25/nyregion/ny-child-abuse-database.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See N.Y.C. Dep't of Consumer Affs., Lifting up Paid Care Work (2018).

and process. The interpretation of many of these new provisions is currently under active litigation in nearly every hearing.

By funding this program, the City Council is profoundly transforming the lives of hundreds of people who are eligible to have their names removed from the SCR, so they regain the ability to access employment opportunities and restore custody rights for their children. This is especially crucial for Black, Brown, and low-income parents, to begin addressing the systemic racial inequities, economic disparities, family separation and instability perpetuated by ACS targeting.

# C. The Right to Family Advocacy Project avoids unnecessary family separation and removes barriers to employment for hundreds of low-income NYC parents.

Through the Right to Family Advocacy Project, low-income parents in New York City gain access to attorneys via hotlines, emails, and walk-in hours when confronted with an ACS investigation and when employment opportunities are denied due to an indicated case on the SCR. During ACS investigations, teams comprising attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and parent advocates are available to advise parents regarding their rights, choices, and the consequences of decisions. This proactive, client-centered engagement results in better-informed and a more nuanced understanding of family circumstances by ACS. Our teams aid parents in providing helpful information to ACS, identifying their strengths and resources, accessing services and material assistance, and addressing underlying issues. Our advocates accompany clients to conferences with ACS, schools, and with medical providers, often leading to resolution without the need for court involvement.

In challenging indicated cases on the State Central Registry, our multidisciplinary teams represent parents and caregivers in administrative reviews and hearings, drafting affidavits, negotiating with ACS attorneys, securing necessary discovery, documentation, and court orders, and litigating cases based on the most current legal standards. This holistic approach ensures clients have access to employment opportunities to support and strengthen their families without facing discrimination.

Our success in having SCR reports amended or sealed during FY23 — which ranged from 90% to 100% among our offices—has enabled parents to access employment and support their families. Data compiled from the four family defense organizations demonstrates the effectiveness of the Right to Family Advocacy Project. With City Council funding in FY23, the family defense organizations collectively assisted over a thousand parents and caretakers during ACS investigations and SCR administrative proceedings.

Through early advocacy and identification of appropriate services and resources, we avoided unnecessary and traumatic family separations, often preventing family court filings. This has led to significant fiscal savings for the city by minimizing removals and reducing court filings, thereby conserving valuable court resources for cases where complex interventions are necessary. For instance, in FY23, approximately 84% of cases represented by BxD during ACS investigations did

not proceed to court. BDS and CFR similarly saw rates around 83% while NDS witnessed nearly 94%.

In cases where Article 10 proceedings were initiated, early advocacy influenced the outcomes. In the Bronx, 84% of cases filed in court in FY23 resulted in children remaining at home or being placed with family, rather than in the foster system. At CFR, 88% of children avoided foster care, equating to 112 children. At NDS, nearly 86% of children were spared the trauma of the foster system. The Right to Family Advocacy Project not only prevents family separation, reducing acute and systemic trauma, but also delivers substantial cost savings for the city.

We deeply value the opportunity to emphasize the vital need for increased funding to ensure that parents confronting the possibility of losing their children have the support they need to preserve their family bonds. The Right to Family Advocacy Project goes beyond just providing legally mandated representation—it involves delivering high-quality, holistic, and zealous advocacy and social work services that have been demonstrated to make a real difference. A difference that is only possible through the City Council's support with an increased investment in funding that will enable us to continue serving all those in need while meeting rising expenses.

# III. <u>The State Must Appropriate and the City Must Commit to Adequate Funding for</u> <u>Parental Representation</u>

Our offices are actively pursuing sufficient funding for Article 10 representation from both the city and state. Following years of extensive advocacy efforts with the city to secure additional funding for interdisciplinary parental representation, we are currently engaged in a procurement process. Our hope is that this process will address the longstanding concerns we've raised regarding the historical underfunding of our offices. We hope to see a significant increase in funding in the final contracts for Article 10 representation. Once the contract details are available, we will promptly update you on whether the much-needed increase has been realized. We ask the City Council to remain vigilant in monitoring this process and to collaborate with us, as service providers, should the funding fall short of enabling us to meet the caseload standards set by the Office of Indigent Legal Services.

We also urge this Council to call on the New York State Legislature and Governor Hochul to rescind the sweeping of \$234 million from the Indigent Legal Services Fund (ILSF) included in the Executive Budget. Instead, we implore them to appropriate additional funding in the budget to address the mounting crisis in family court and parental representation.

## A. New York City Has Historically Underfunded Article 10 Parental Representation

# **1.** New York City Must Ensure that Funding Is Adequate for Providers to Meet Existing Caseload Standards

The recent implementation of caseload standards by New York's Office of Indigent Legal Service (ILS), Caseload Standards for Parents' Attorneys in New York State Family Court Mandated Representation Cases (ILS Caseload Standards), underscores what we've been advocating for years: our parental representation contracts have historically been underfunded, jeopardizing the benefits of our representation model for both the city and our clients. We are encouraged by the increase included in last year's Article 10 contract and the funding allocated during the procurement process, based on the data provided by our offices. This data clearly illustrated that our existing funding was insufficient to hire the unnecessary staff to meet the caseload standards, resulting in unmanageable caseloads and unprecedented staff turnover. As we await the finalization of the procurement process for the Article 10 FY25 contract, we anticipate a significant increase in funding for the city's parental representation programs. We are committed to updating this Council and collaborating to ensure that the funding level aligns with the programmatic needs of our offices and enables us to meet the state's caseload standards. While there have been notable increases in the overall budget for Article 10 work, particularly for ILS caseload relief and additional conflict representation, these enhancements do not negate the necessity for discretionary funding for early defense and SCR advocacy. These aspects have proven indispensable to our clients and the communities we serve.

# 2. Since the pandemic, the providers have documented that the city's funding is inadequate to address the complex needs of our clients, limiting the potential effectiveness of our work.

Since the onset of the pandemic, ACS has predominantly filed cases seeking family separation through foster placement or exclusion orders. These cases are notably complex, resource-intensive, and challenging, requiring significant support from our team. While Article 10 filings may have decreased since 2020, data shows that placements of children in the foster system began to creep back up after the pandemic<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, cases filed during and after the pandemic are characterized by heightened complexity, necessitating greater social work support. We now encounter more clients grappling with mental health issues, including increased psychiatric hospitalizations, as well as families affected by domestic violence, homelessness, and a reduction in available supportive services. Additionally, there has been a rise in non-citizen clients, attributed to the influx of asylum-seekers to the city. Since 2020, ACS has increasingly utilized pre-petitions, including 1029 and 1034 petitions to seek judicial approval for parents to produce children, enter

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Andy Newman, Pandemic Shows New York City is Too Quick to Split Families, Advocates Say, The New York Times, (Mar. 15, 2023), available at <u>https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/nyregion/child-abuse-pandemic.html</u>.

a family's home, or issue orders of protection while investigating the other parent. Although we frequently resolve these cases without the court resorting to family separation, they nonetheless contribute to our workload and require frequent court appearances and intensive advocacy from both attorneys and social workers.

Another concerning trend is ACS's advocacy for family separation through the District Attorney's Office, obtaining full criminal court orders of protection without filing companion Article 10 cases in family court. Where there is no companion Article 10 case, a parent must address the family separation issue in criminal court. In June of 2021, the appellate division held that parents are entitled to a due process hearing when they are separated from their children by virtue of a criminal court order of protection. This has resulted in our attorneys and advocates lending their expertise to their colleagues in criminal court, litigating hearings, and negotiating with ACS and the district attorney in criminal court proceedings. In addition, if ACS does not file a petition, we often must file a custody case in family court.

As family court struggles with a shortage of judges, it continues to confront a backlog of cases that accumulated during the pandemic, many of which involve children still in foster placements. During the pandemic, the time required to resolve a family's case saw a significant increase, with lasting impacts on pending cases today. For example, the average duration of client engagement at CFR rose from 2 years before the pandemic to 2.6 years in FY22. In Brooklyn, closed cases now take 22% longer compared to pre-pandemic norms. BDS currently has 39% of its pending caseload aged over 2 years, a figure on the rise. Before Covid-19, 15% of NDS cases exceeded two years, a proportion that has since more than doubled to 32%. Similarly, the share of NDS cases lasting three or more years rose from about 5% to 16% today. At the end of FY18, 17% of BxD cases were pending for over 2 years, with 9% pending for over three years. Presently, 25% of pending cases have been open for two or more years, with 14% open for three or more years. At CFR, approximately 15% of clients had matters pending after 36 months in FY18, a figure that climbed to 26% at the end of FY21. By the end of FY23, 43% of CFR's clients had pending petitions over two years old. This data underscores the critical need for adequate funding to ensure sufficient staff capacity to manage the significant volume of older and more complex cases. Prolonged cases not only impede family unity but perpetuate cycles of trauma, surveillance, and instability for vulnerable families, highlighting the client-need for enhanced resources and support to expedite case resolution and alleviate the burdens faced by those navigating the family regulation system.

The prolonged duration of cases holds significant ramifications, as it increases the likelihood of subsequent legal actions such as petitions for permanent termination of a parent's rights (TPR), custody petitions, and new allegations of neglect or newborn petitions—will be filed against a client. The ensuing legal proceedings require more legal work and extensive extrajudicial support from our social workers and other support staff to ensure favorable outcomes for our clients. Termination of Parental Rights, often referred to as the "civil death penalty", results in the

permanent severance of familial bonds and is frequently triggered by a parent's inability to access necessary services or particularly in New York, safe, permanent housing. With few exceptions, federal law requires that parental rights be terminated where a child has been in a foster placement for 15 of the most recent 22 months. This underscores the critical need to expedite case resolutions to mitigate devastating, life-long consequences for families.

While the shift to virtual or hybrid proceedings offers increased accessibility for our clients, numerous technological challenges persist, hindering effective representation in court. These challenges include difficulties admitting parties and attorneys from virtual waiting rooms, unresponsive computer peripherals, distracting background noise and feedback, and inadequate bandwidth in clients' homes. Many clients have voiced concerns about confusion during virtual court proceedings, as they struggle to identify participants and follow the proceedings that dictate the fate of their family.

Due to persistent underfunding, our offices are grappling with alarmingly high rates of attrition among attorneys and social workers. When an attorney or social worker leaves their team, their cases must be redistributed among remaining staff. Although the logistics of case transfer can be seamless, rebuilding the trust and cooperation between advocate and client is a challenging process, particularly when it occurs during the most consequential moments of the case. Balancing the demands of an overwhelming caseload that already far surpasses ILS standards with the need to cultivate new relationships with transferred clients presents a significant challenge. Despite efforts to onboard new staff, most are recent law graduates who require extensive training and cannot immediately assume a full caseload or manage the demands of numerous transfer cases, let alone direct the intricate strategy of complex cases. As a result, the bandwidth and capacity of our staff continue to thin, exacerbating the cycle of attrition.

All these changes have contributed to the extended duration of children's stay within the foster system, resulting in increasingly complex cases. As a result, the probability of TPR or custody petitions being initiated significantly increases. Our ongoing capacity to navigate these challenges and devise innovative solutions is now more crucial than ever. This not only affects the lives of individual families but also perpetuates systemic challenges within the family regulation system, further emphasizing the urgency of our work.

# **B.** Advocate for the State Legislature and Governor to Rescind the Proposed ILSF Sweep <u>and</u> Appropriate \$50 million for Parental Representation in the State Budget

We urge this Council to advocate for the New York State Legislature and Governor Hochul to reverse the \$234 million transfer from the Indigent Legal Services Fund (ILSF) to the General Fund, as proposed in the Executive Budget. Additionally, we urge the state to allocate \$50 million for parental representation in FY25.

The ILSF was established to enhance the quality of public defense in both criminal and family courts. It supports public defender offices, including those serving families in New York City. Managed by the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services, the fund operates under an independent board chaired by New York State's Chief Judge Rowan Wilson. Funded by fees collected by various agencies, such as the Office of Court Administration (OCA), the ILSF requires an appropriation in the state budget to utilize its resources fully. Despite requests from the ILS Board, the Governor has consistently failed to appropriate the necessary funds, leading to surplus amounts that the Governor believes can be diverted from the fund. If the proposed budget removes \$234 million from the ILSF, it may jeopardize meeting legislatively mandated caseload limits for offices and attorneys across the state.

While the State Senate's budget proposal rejected the ILS sweep and allocated an additional \$46 million for parental representation, the Assembly did not oppose the sweep and did not allocate additional funding for parental representation. We urge you to encourage the Governor and Assembly to align with the Senate's stance, rejecting the ILS sweep and appropriating the additional funds required for parental representation.

# SUMMARY

We urge the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project and increase the funding from \$2.6 million to \$3.3 million. This increase is imperative to enhance our capacity and address the mounting costs associated with providing indispensable, high-quality legal services to vulnerable families navigating ACS investigations and scrutiny from the family regulation system.

Additionally, we urge the City Council to ensure that the city's Article 10 contracts reflect the increased funding required to meet state caseload standards. It is vital that our representation remains client-centered, effective, holistic, and sustainable, and adequate funding is crucial to achieving this goal.

We also call upon the City Council to advocate vigorously, alongside the other 57 counties in New York State, to safeguard the integrity of our legal system and protect the due process rights of New Yorkers by preserving the integrity of the Indigent Legal Services Fund. Additionally, we urge the City Council to advocate for the appropriation of \$50 million in the New York State budget specifically designated for parent representation. These measures are essential to uphold the rights of parents and caregivers and ensure equitable access to justice for all families.

We thank the City Council and this Committee for hearing our request and for its continued support of the people we serve through our programs. Please reach out to our offices with any questions.

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**Center for** 

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# Center for Family Life in Sunset Park Testimony on DYCD's COMPASS Explore Committee on Children and Youth

I am Kristie Mancell, Program Director at Center for Family Life in Sunset Park's (CFLSP), a neighborhood-based social service organization in the lowincome, immigrant community of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Since the opening of Sunset Park High School (SPHS), CFLSP has been the school's primary community partner, maintaining a full-day onsite presence and providing a comprehensive range of school-wide services including afterschool, summer, college and career readiness, and youth employment programs. We were extremely disappointed to learn that Mayor Adams has proposed to cut funding for critical afterschool programs in a decision which will result in over 3,500 students losing access to free out-of-school hours academic enrichment opportunities between cuts to both COMPASS Explore and SONYC. Our afterschool program at SPHS, "Sunset Leaders," is funded through DYCD COMPASS Explore, a contract which is set to end on June 30, 2024, meaning that all 89 of our currently enrolled participants will no longer receive essential services which include in-depth learning opportunities and leadership experiences, advanced visual and performing arts programs, service learning opportunities, inter-generational mentorship, and college and career readiness services, among others.

Sunset Park is a diverse and densely populated neighborhood where 23% of residents and 25% of neighborhood children live below the poverty line. Nearly half of residents were born outside the U.S. and 46% have limited English proficiency. Despite a population of nearly 38,000 children and youth under the age of 18, it was not until 2009 that the first public high school in Sunset Park opened, following over 30 years of advocacy by community members, including Center for Family Life staff and participants. To this day, the majority of middle and high school students must travel outside our community to attend school, impacting school performance, graduation and readiness for higher education and employment. Among adults in Sunset Park, 32% did not graduate from high school—the sixth highest rate among all NYC neighborhoods—and only 34% have a bachelor's degree. In this context, there is an exceptionally high need for free, safe, high-quality academically and socially enriching programs for youth in our community.

Our COMPASS Explore-funded "Sunset Leaders" program serves as a vital resource for families in our high-need community, as evidenced by the fact that our program is overenrolled, serving 89 youth although only 75 slots are funded. "Sunset Leaders" is crucial to sustaining a positive school environment for

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students at SPHS, as it serves to maintain students engaged and connected in their learning, with their peers, and broader community, while providing opportunities for student voice and self-expression, and leadership. This program offers students leadership pathways that inspire autonomy, social-emotional learning, and skill development, supports academic achievement, and nurtures a sense of belonging and contribution among high school youth. Sunset Leaders has continuously exceeded program expectations, receiving "Above Standard" DYCD evaluations in both FY23 and FY24 due to our high enrollment, participant engagement, and effective leadership and team-building activities.

"Sunset Leaders" engages high school students in leadership experiences that open up meaningful roles for youth, enabling them to grow, and experience themselves as capable and valued members of their school and community. Program participants choose from three leadership pathways, which allows them to exercise autonomy in shaping their experience, while exploring their unique interests and building critical skills. A unique aspect of our program model lies in its deep connection with Sunset Park's community, as youth are actively engaged in reflecting on local issues and their impact on our community. This approach not only enhances high school participants' understanding of the neighborhood they live in, but also fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment towards making a positive difference in their community. As an example, each spring participants in our afterschool program create and present an improvisational play that brings to life the struggles and vitality of young people and families in our diverse neighborhood. One aspect of show preparations includes a three-day camping retreat for youth to rehearse, which for many participants, is their first opportunity to venture outside of our community. After three months of intense creative collaboration and rehearsal, participants are ready to perform their final show for school and community audiences.

In addition to our annual spring performances, throughout the year our program engages parents and community members in other meaningful events, including parent orientations, family and community nights, holiday/cultural celebrations, art exhibits and performances that provide regular, meaningful opportunities for family members to share in their children's experiences. During our College, Career, Community Building Day, youth and parents are exposed to a wide variety of opportunities that students can pursue after high school, while also engaging in team-building activities where participants and community members work together to accomplish shared goals. Such initiatives are crucial for Sunset Park's immigrant families, providing indispensable resources for navigating educational challenges, college preparation, and career planning. With a growing number of new immigrant families in our neighborhood, these events are particularly significant as they help orient new arrivals, support children and parents in overcoming social isolation, and foster a sense of community for families as they assimilate to life in the U.S.

Over my years as a Program Director at SPHS, I have observed firsthand how the "Sunset Leaders" program builds confidence, strengthens relationships, increases leadership capabilities, and fosters community at Sunset Park High School. A loss of funding for this program will have significant negative impacts on our school and community as a whole, as almost 100 youth will be left without needed supports. I, along with Julie Stein Brockway, Co-Executive Director at CFLSP, fully support United Neighborhood Houses' advocacy for the full restoration of \$6.9 million to save afterschool programming for 3,538 students in COMPASS Explore and SONYC programs. Restoring funding to afterschool programs across NYC will enable us to further our mission of decreasing disparities and enhancing the stability and well-being of students and families in our community. Your support is not just a funding decision—it's a commitment to eliminating educational barriers and promoting the health, stability, and prosperity of all communities in NYC.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Althea Stevens, Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth for strongly advocating to restore funds to afterschool programs, and to the entire New York City Council for allowing us to speak about this vital program and the severe impact that these budget cuts have on youth and families in our community.

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Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

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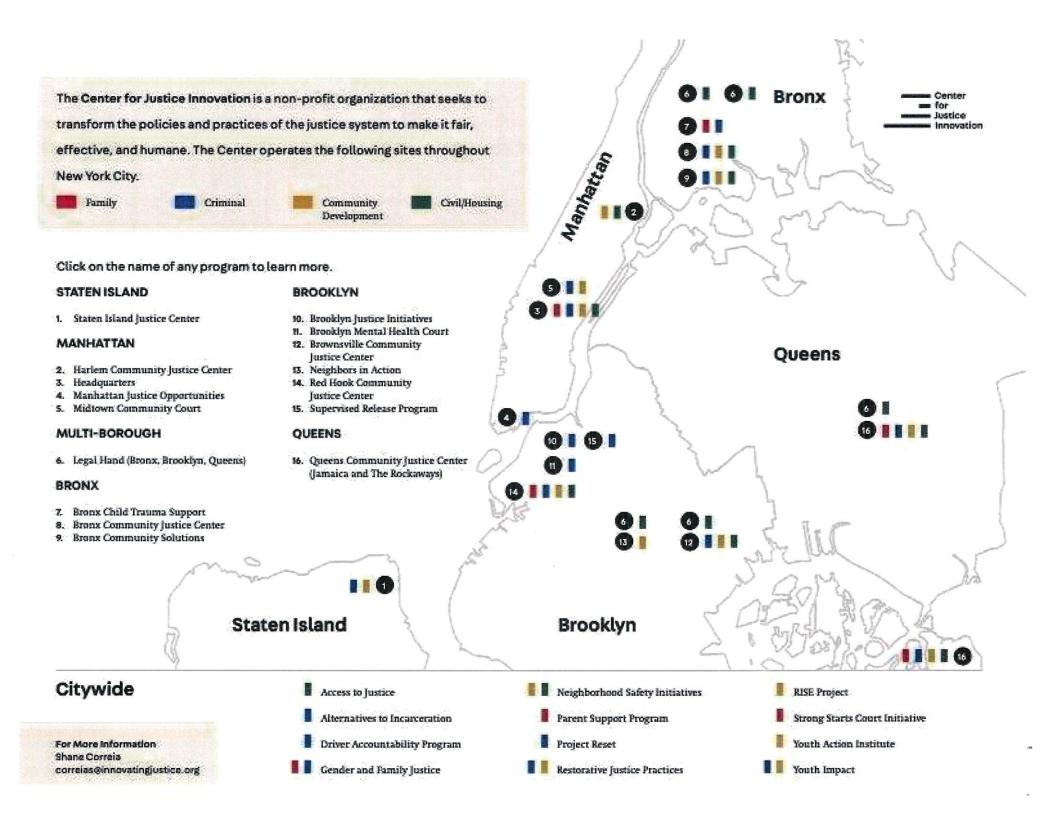
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# Center for Justice Innovation

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Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

# Center for Justice Innovation New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth March 22, 2024

Good morning, Chair Stevens and esteemed members of the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Over the past year, shootings have decreased by nearly 25% citywide.<sup>1</sup> However, startling data is revealing that both perpetrators and victims of gun violence are getting younger. Teenagers have become both the victims and perpetrators of gun violence at a higher rate than adults since the pandemic. Between 2018 and 2022, teenagers in New York City have been arrested and charged with murder at a rate that grew twice as fast as the rate for adults.<sup>2</sup> As evidenced by the data, there is a dire need for programming targeted towards stemming the crisis of youth gun violence. This is an area the Center for Justice Innovation (The Center) has demonstrated expertise in over the years. Today I will be discussing three of our programs dedicated towards this work, Save Our Streets (S.O.S.), Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement (RISE) Project, and Youth Weapons Diversion within the courts.

### **Research on Young Gun Carriers**

The Center's work is informed by a highly skilled team of researchers. In the past few years, the team has published two large scale studies on young gun carriers in New York City, "Gotta Make Your Own Heaven': Guns, Safety, and the Edge of Adulthood in New York City," and "Two Battlefields: Opps, Cops and NYC Youth Gun Culture." Together, researchers interviewed over 400 young gun carriers to understand their motivations and fears. Many of the researchers had personal connections to participants' social networks. These relationships allow for higher levels of trust and honesty, rarely found in prior research.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> New York City Police Department. (2024, January 4). NYPD announces December 2023, end-of-year citywide crime statistics.

https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/p00098/nypd-december-2023-end-of-year-citywide-crime-statistics

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cramer, M., & Parnell, W. (2023, July 18). *Boy, 15, is fatally shot in Brooklyn after dispute among teens*. The New York Times. <u>https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/nyregion/teen-shooting-brooklyn.html</u>

Our study of young gun-carriers in Brooklyn, New York, "Two Battlefields," identifies fear—fear of one's own death or the death of one's family members—as the overwhelming factor behind the decision to carry. In-depth interviews found shocking levels of exposure to violence among participants and near-universal experiences of physical harm and trauma. The vast majority had friends or family members who had been shot, and most had come under fire themselves.

These experiences fostered an atmosphere of unpredictable violence, forcing many participants to become hypervigilant. For the majority, fear for their own lives (75 percent) or for their families (72 percent) was the primary reason for carrying a gun. Under constant threat—from other gun-carriers as well as from police—and with virtually no ties to the mainstream economy, participants describe gun-carrying as a form of resilience in a world with few options. Only a small fraction had access to stable work in the mainstream economy, with most relying on informal "hustles"—like drug dealing and scams—to make ends meet. The inherent dangers of the underground economy drove many participants to carry a gun for protection.<sup>3</sup>

#### Save Our Streets (S.O.S.)

The Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) program works in four New York City neighborhoods across the Bronx and Brooklyn, partnering with local organizations, faith leaders, residents, and the individuals most likely to be involved in a shooting. Our staff prevent gun violence from occurring by mediating conflicts and acting as peer counselors to people who are at risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. We work closely with neighborhood leaders and businesses to promote a visible and public message against gun violence, encouraging local voices to articulate that gun violence is unacceptable. These local voices are respected pillars of the community, adults that youth and their families know and trust.

Using public health strategies, S.O.S. seeks to prevent the spread of violence. Its key elements are:

**Community Outreach and Hospital Response:** The program deploys outreach workers and violence interrupters who engage youth and adults in the community at risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. The staff, who all have intimate knowledge of life on the streets, serve as counselors, offering advice and guidance on how to respond to conflicts without violence. They use positive peer pressure to redirect high-risk individuals towards school or jobs and help them think and behave differently about violence. Violence interrupters' primary focus is to prevent shootings from occurring by engaging in mediation. Hospital responders partner with local hospitals to respond to shooting injuries, connecting with gunshot-wound victims and their families at the hospital to offer resources and prevent retaliation.

**Public Education:** S.O.S. staff and volunteers distribute palm cards and posters with messages that promote peaceful conflict resolution, decry violence, and offer S.O.S. as a safe

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>White, E., B. Spate, J. Alexander & R. Swaner (July 2023) "Two Battlefields": Opps, Cops, and NYC Youth Gun Culture. New York, NY: Center for Justice Innovation.

https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2023/TwoBattlefields Report 07142023.pdf

resource for people at risk of experiencing gun violence. Merchants have signs in their windows to support our "Stop Shooting. Start Living," message and count the number of days since the last shooting. Social media, texting, and e-mails keep the community updated and involved. S.O.S. campaigns are often designed particularly to reach youth with a specific, thought-provoking focus.

**Faith-Based Leaders:** Faith-based organizations are an essential partner in the S.O.S. violence-reduction strategy. Faith-based leaders are encouraged to preach against gun violence from their pulpits, attend vigils, counsel people who are potentially involved in gun violence, and refer high-risk individuals to the program.

**Community Mobilization**: S.O.S. has built strong relationships with local businesses and agencies to spread an anti-violence message and promote community collaboration. Staff, participants, and volunteers organize block parties, arts showcases, presentations, and trainings to advance the idea that gun violence is both unacceptable and preventable. The program organizes community forums, rallies and marches, speak-outs, and barbecues to advance a simple idea: our community is moving past gun violence. S.O.S. also organizes a rally or vigil in the location of every shooting to call attention to and denounce the tragic results of violence. Local residents work as canvassers to promote events and disseminate program information.

**Youth Programming:** Our youth specific program, Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets (YO S.O.S.) mobilizes youth in a twice weekly after-school program. Participating youth become peer educators and advocates for change in the local schools and throughout the community. S.O.S. also carries out the following initiatives:

- Working with Justice-Involved Youth: S.O.S. Bronx is contracted through the city Administration for Children's Services to work with young people in Horizon Detention Center, The Children's Center, and the Close to Home program. The goal is to reduce violence by changing the mindsets of the youth we serve. Staff facilitate workshops, including Job Readiness, Know Your Rights (provided by Legal Aid), Self-Care and Awareness, Reflections of Oneself, and Creative Arts plus game and movie nights. If needed, staff will accompany participants to court and write recommendation letters to help support their cases.
- **Conflict Mediation in Schools:** School-based conflict mediation provides culturally competent programming to at-risk youth to reduce their involvement in violence while increasing attendance, academic progress, and other social measures. The program includes school-wide activities to change the culture around violence and to assist schools in their response to incidents in school or the community.
- Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program: This program is a seasonal employment program for participants 14- to 24-years-old. The program consists of two phases: a sixweek summer program and a 25-week school-year program. Job responsibilities include community canvassing, asset mapping, data gathering, community outreach, and coordinating shooting responses.

- In This Together: Also known as "ITT," this is a therapeutic program that fosters a safe space for individuals in the community and participants to share and process trauma experienced by themselves or someone close to them. Through individual and group therapy, participants learn coping skills and other techniques such as mindfulness to incorporate in their daily lives. Groups like the King and Queen Makers tap into the greatness of young people and teach them how to use their talents to be positive and safe.
- Youth Council: The Youth Council serves young people ages 16 to 24 by providing a safe space to develop leadership and community skills. Participants work to become positive contributors to their neighborhoods. Learning takes place through workshops, community meetings, and recreational activities. Goals include reducing violence and forming a healthy, vibrant peer culture.

#### S.O.S. Results

Our S.O.S. programs use data to develop strategies that work to identify neighborhood "hot spots" and the times and days of the week shootings occur. This allows our teams and resources to be focused most effectively to engage in those areas around specific times to reduce shootings.

In 2018, S.O.S. Brooklyn outreach workers and violence interrupters de-escalated more than 106 violent conflicts, responded to 21 shootings, and forged over 200 peace agreements. There are up to 90 individuals enrolled in the S.O.S. Brooklyn program at any given time, with more than 80 percent of participants assessed as high risk for involvement in gun violence. Nearly 8,000 people attended more than 80 community events organized by S.O.S. Brooklyn designed to spread awareness and messages of peace and unity.

An evaluation of the S.O.S. program in Crown Heights demonstrated that gun violence decreased six percent in the 77th Precinct (where S.O.S. operates) while increasing 20 percent in nearby precincts with similar demographics and crime rates. (Researchers concluded it was unlikely that the gun violence increase in nearby precincts was due to displacement of violence to surrounding areas.)<sup>4</sup>

#### Youth Weapons Diversion

Midtown Community Justice Center launched Youth Weapons Diversion in fall of 2021, seeking to fill a gap in holistic alternative-to-prosecution diversion options for young people ages 14 to 17 arrested for gun and other weapons possession. In collaboration with the New York City Law Department and defense agencies, the program provides an early off-ramp from the traditional Family Court process and builds supportive connections for participants. It employs a case manager, social worker, and local community mentors who utilize their own experiences to connect with young people and unpack their behavior while simultaneously attaching them to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. (2022). "S.O.S. Brooklyn Fact Sheet". Unpublished internal document.

meaningful services, building on the young person's strengths, setting goals, engaging the supportive people in their lives, and providing a forum for meaningfully addressing harm.

This 90-day diversion program begins with an in-person intake with the youth participant and their parent(s) or guardian(s). During subsequent weekly sessions, the young person is supported in identifying their needs, interests, and strengths. Each participant also sets educational, employment, and social-emotional goals that they work on throughout programming. Early in the program, the Justice Center connects participants to a community-based Center site such as Brownsville Community Justice Center or Neighbors in Action (based in Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn) or another appropriate youth development organization in their own neighborhood for ongoing engagement, even after program completion. These sites are deeply connected to the communities they serve, seeing participants through the entire process and maintaining engagement after program completion. In addition, they provide paid internships and workforce readiness services, educational support, prosocial activities, and community engagement and leadership opportunities as well as credible messenger mentors with lived experience and expertise working with young people who carry weapons.

Ultimately, participants and staff build toward a support circle, a restorative justice process that supports the young person in moving forward from their weapons possession charge by bringing together their loved ones and community partners in a process that centers the voices of those most impacted by the arrest. Preparation sessions with the young people are integrated into weekly check-ins, where staff help them to understand and process the underlying issues that led to the decision to carry a weapon and explore how to prevent it in the future. Preparation sessions also help staff explore ways to connect participants to organizations and individuals who can assist them in working toward their goals. Staff work with the participant and their parent(s) or guardian(s) to develop a list of the participant's supporters to invite to the circle and work to prepare those individuals for the circle by describing the process, setting expectations, and assessing whether they are well-suited to support the youth in the process.

During the support circle, the youth and their supporters discuss the impact of the arrest and the root causes of the weapon-carrying behavior, exploring the day of the arrest, the precipitating events, and their relationship to community violence. Recognizing the systemic factors that lead youth to feel unsafe, the restorative process holds space for accountability at an individual, family, and community level. Centering the youth's voice, the restorative process provides an opportunity for them, their family members, and their community to work together to develop safety plans and actionable steps to increase feelings of safety and reduce the need to carry a weapon. Restorative justice looks beyond the arrest—the youth, with their supporters, discuss their hopes for the future and the steps the young person intends to take toward their goals, and everyone puts forth concrete ideas as to how they can support the young person in taking those steps.

Successful completion of the program results in a "decline to prosecute" with a sealed record.For cases that have already been filed, the petition is withdrawn and the case sealed.

These outcomes avoid a full criminal process, a criminal record, and many collateral consequences for young people at a pivotal age. Since the program's launch three years ago, the program has received 43 referrals, of which 36 were accepted and engaged with programming.32 participants have graduated, fully resolving their cases in Family Court, and four cases are currently active.<sup>5</sup> When participants graduate, they move forward with a network of supportive individuals and resources. Perhaps most importantly, they are left with an understanding of what motivated them to carry a weapon, and why they will not repeat that choice in the future. With funding from City Council, we hope to increase the number of participants served.

#### Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement (RISE) Project

The RISE Project transforms responses to intimate partner violence, focusing specifically on its intersection with gun violence. Gun violence and intimate partner violence are often viewed as separate problems that require different responses, but neighborhoods impacted by high rates of gun violence also have the highest levels of reported domestic violence incidents. Access to a gun makes it five times more likely that a partner experiencing abuse will be killed.<sup>6</sup>

The need for these services is increasing, as domestic violence related homicides are displaying startling upward trends. According to a recently released report from the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, there were 71 domestic violence homicide deaths in New York in 2022, up nearly 15% from the year before.<sup>7</sup> Black and Hispanic women were disproportionately affected, with Black women comprising 41% of the victims despite representing just 21% of the population and Hispanic women comprising 36% of the victims, despite making up just 28% of the population. This disproportionate effect also extends to the boroughs, with Brooklyn experiencing a 225% escalation in intimate partner homicides and the Bronx experiencing a 57% increase.<sup>8</sup> Seeing these disturbing data trends, it is imperative that we increase funding to these services, rather than decrease.

In neighborhoods across New York City, RISE implements community-centered interventions that build local capacity to respond to and prevent intimate partner violence. RISE works with people causing harm in their relationships to stop the violence and transform behaviors and offers people experiencing harm the support they need to navigate systems to obtain safety. RISE's program offerings seamlessly integrate public health, healing-centered approaches, and restorative justice strategies through the following:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. (2024). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study," American Journal of Public Health 93, no. 7 (July 2003): 1089–97

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Shwe, E., Carlson, S., & Pinder, H. (2024, February 10). In NYC, 2022 was a grim year for domestic violence homicide. Things have gotten worse.

https://gothamist.com/news/in-nyc-2022-was-a-grim-year-for-domestic-violence-homicide-things-have-gotten-wors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Graham, A. (2024, January 31). Domestic violence-related homicides skyrocket in NYC, according to new report. <u>https://www.amny.com/news/domestic-violence-homicides-skyrocket-nyc/?oref=csny\_firstread\_nl</u>

- **Community Initiatives:** By engaging communities most impacted by violence, RISE builds capacity to co-create safety in the community and within our homes by changing the societal norms that tolerate intimate partner violence. RISE implements community healing, placemaking, and community organizing strategies that activate neighborhood spaces to prevent violence and support healthy relationships. Youth programming provides space for youth to understand how to maintain healthy relationships, develop youth advocacy projects, and build networks of peer support.
- **Prevention Strategies:** RISE engages community members to play a role in preventing, responding to, and ultimately ending intimate partner violence through workshops, youth programs, community events, and neighborhood-specific public education campaigns.
- Capacity Building: Through tailored training and technical assistance to community-based and gun violence prevention organizations, RISE builds community capacity to prevent violence, support healthy relationship norms, and reduce tolerance for intimate partner violence
- **Crisis Response:** RISE responds to crises through immediate interventions and addressing existing service gaps that make it difficult for those most marginalized or impacted by intersectional violence to access support.
- Youth Programs: RISE engages youth to develop and implement projects focused on changing harmful behaviors around intimate partner violence. Youth learn about dating violence, consent, and navigating relationships through workshops, public education campaigns, arts initiatives, and community events.
- Transformative Initiatives: Community-based interventions engage individuals who cause harm in their intimate relationships. The goal for the individual is to stop causing harm, take accountability, and change their behavior to ultimately prevent abuse
- Individual Interventions: RISE provides individual services to support participants in recognizing the root causes of their harmful behaviors and co-creates strategies to change behavior using an intersectional and restorative framework.
- **Group-Based Interventions:** RISE supports people to hold themselves accountable and to build networks of peer accountability through group interventions. Voluntary, neighborhood-based groups facilitated by trained staff provide accessible space to challenge harmful behaviors and beliefs around intimate partner violence.
- **Community Strategies:** RISE provides community healing circles and interventions to provide ongoing support when violence has been caused in the community. RISE also develops tools, trainings, and interventions to increase community engagement to challenge violence such as bystander intervention trainings, community-focused safety planning, and community campaigns.

### Conclusion

As recent studies have revealed, gun carrying and gun violence among youth is a growing crisis. The Center for Justice Innovation urges City Council to invest in holistic, sustainable, and supportive responses to issues of public safety. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Council and appreciate the opportunity to testify today.



520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018 p. 646 386 3100 f. 212 397 0985 innovatingjustice.org

Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

#### FY25 Center for Justice Innovation Major Proposals

 #165625 - Staten Island Justice Center - Community Justice Center - \$987,087 (Renewal/Expansion)

# Speaker's Initiative; Innovative Criminal Justice Programs; Alternatives to Incarceration (ATIs)

**Description:** In response to growing need in the community, the Justice Center has worked in collaboration with the Richmond County District Attorney's Office to plan and begin operationalizing programming for a Staten Island Community Justice Center. This work puts the Justice Center on a path to replicate and launch community-based interventions and initiatives piloted and established at the Center for Justice Innovation's existing Community Justice Centers in other boroughs. Based on results of a comprehensive public safety assessment, several pilot initiatives for at-risk youth are being implemented in the spring of 2024, in addition to the reestablishment of Youth Impact. In FY25, the Justice Center will also have a dedicated community outreach van to allow for expanded recruitment. Staff will continue planning for the increased scaling of operations, working on program design, building data and technology infrastructure and strengthening partnerships. In response to the needs identified in the assessment, the Justice Center will continue planning additional initiatives in areas such as veterans support, housing assistance, and violence prevention.

## #172167 - Center for Justice Innovation (formerly Center for Court Innovation) -\$750,000

Innovative Criminal Justice Programs (Renewal/Expansion); Speakers Initiative

**Description:** This is an application to support the continuation of the Center for Justice Innovation's innovative criminal justice responses, community-based public safety

#### **Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DoVE) (Renewal/Expansion)**

**Description:** This is an application for continued support of the RISE Project. RISE is a part of New York City's Crisis Management System, working in partnership with Cure Violence sites to provide community-based intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention services to individuals at risk of being impacted by gun violence in communities most impacted. RISE works to reduce IPV by engaging individuals who are causing abuse in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior, change community norms to reduce tolerance for IPV, train credible messengers to identify risk factors for IPV, build skills to talk about IPV, and connect community members in need of services to RISE. RISE incorporates components of the Cure Violence and restorative justice models.

#### #167064 - Queens Community Justice Center: UPLIFT - \$100,000

Court-Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal); Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations (Renewal); Speakers Initiative (Renewal); Community Safety and Victims Services Initiative;

**Description:** To address the high levels of exposure to community violence and trauma among young men of color in Queens, the Queens Community Justice Center piloted UPLIFT in FY22, a program that provides trauma and healing services to justice-involved young men of color, ages 16-25. By offering client-driven individual therapeutic sessions and supportive group workshops, case management and victim services assistance, and advocacy and mentoring, participants are supported to recognize, process, and heal their own trauma, resulting in better life outcomes. Given the program's initial success, the Justice Center was able to fully implement and sustain the program, thanks to the ongoing support of City Council.

### #167148 - Queens Community Justice Center: Queens HOPE (Heal, Overcome, Prosper, Empower) - \$75,000

Speakers Initiative (Renewal);

Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DoVE); Community Safety and Victims Services

**Description:** The Queens Community Justice Center seeks funding for its Queens HOPE (Heal, Overcome, Prosper, Empower) program. Queens HOPE aims to provide client-centered and trauma-informed advocacy, counseling, victim services, and case

management to young people 25 years old and under that have experienced, or are vulnerable to sex and/or labor exploitation. A social worker and mentor work one-on-one and in a group setting with referred youth, providing intensive case management and trauma-informed, survivor-centered support services, including mentoring. Queens HOPE staff will also provide training/professional development and support to court stakeholders and community partners to build their capacity to identify and provide services to girls and young women who are at risk of, or are victims of, sex and/or labor trafficking.

#### #169968 - Neighbors In Action: Youth Media Lab - \$50,000

#### Digital Inclusion and Literacy (Renewal/Expansion)

**Description:** This is a request for funding for Neighbors in Action (NIA) to expand its Youth Media Lab to include a youth-led social enterprise. The Youth Media Lab's social enterprise will aim to promote, encourage, and create social change by addressing socio-economic challenges. To do this, the Youth Media Lab provides financially sustainable pathways for youth through the digital arts. With the support of City Council, NIA's Youth Media Lab social enterprise will provide 70 youth, ages 15-24, with paid interest-based internships in digital media, technology, entrepreneurship, and youth organizing. An additional 1,000 youth will be engaged through media lab workshops, open hours, and community events. Youth will receive training in media, production, design, social justice, community organizing, and entrepreneurship while building marketable skills in growing creative sectors. Upon program completion, youth can continue engagement through the Media Lab and as peer leaders.

 #170083 - Red Hook Community Justice Center: Community Healing and Wellness \$50,000

### Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DoVE) (Renewal/Expansion)

**Description:** This is an application for the Community Healing and Wellness Program at the Red Hook Community Justice Center, which is a community and court-based program that provides trauma-informed, healing-centered approaches to advocacy, counseling, and case management to both those who have experienced harm and those who have engaged in harm with a goal of contributing to a healthy, resilient, thriving community. The program aims to interrupt cycles of violence and increase community safety by connecting people with the resources they need and want, creating opportunities for healing with those who have been harmed, and creating opportunities for accountability with those who have engaged in harm.

### #170023 - Bronx Child Trauma Support - \$33,0000

### Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations (Renewal)

**Description:** Funding for Bronx Child Trauma Support will support the provision of clinical assessment and treatment of child victims and witnesses to crimes in the Bronx, in partnership with the Bronx District Attorney's Office. Direct services are conducted through evidenced-based trauma-informed intervention models designed to prevent or reduce post-traumatic stress symptoms, suicidality, re-traumatization, and future victimization.

# • #171724 - Red Hook Community Justice Center: Youth Impact - \$20,000

### Community Safety and Victims Services (Renewal/Expansion)

**Description:** The Red Hook Community Justice Center seeks funding from the City Council's Community Safety and Victim Services Initiative to support youth participating in our Youth Impact program. Youth Impact is a peer-led diversion program for young people ages 10-18 referred by local schools, community partners, the court, justice system agencies or local law enforcement. The goal of Youth Impact is to use positive peer influence and a restorative approach to develop young leaders, repair harm, avoid future involvement in the justice system through early intervention, and educate young people about the justice system.



ERIC GONZALEZ DISTRUCT ATTORNEY DISTRICT ATTORNEY KINGS COUNTY 350 JAY STREET BROOKLYN, NY 11201-2908 (718) 250-2202 WWW.BROOKLYNDA ORG

February 28, 2024

Adrienne Adams Speaker, New York City Council City Hall New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of City Council,

On behalf of the office of the Kings County District Attorney, I write in support of key Center for Justice Innovation FY25 City Council Applications to sustain critical Investment in the following areas:

- alternatives to incarceration,
- mental health support,
- programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence,
- and innovative pilot programs that address pressing needs in communities.

These programs will enable Brooklyn to continue to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system wherever possible and building public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

The Center has submitted a proposal for continued support of its Brooklyn Felony Diversion **Programs**, which assist my office in expanding diversion opportunities for felony alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) across Brooklyn, while maintaining public safety and accountability. The Brooklyn Felony Alternatives to Incarceration Court, launched in January 2020 with Council support, offers clinical assessments, individualized community-based interventions, and judicial monitoring on felony cases. I urge the Council to continue fanding this initiative to reduce unnecessary incarceration and strengthen diversion opportunities in Brooklyn. Also included in that application is a request for continued support of the Center's renowned Brooklyn Mental Health Court. For the past twenty plus years, Brooklyn Mental Health Court has served as a pioncering model that offers community-based mental health treatment, paired with rigorous judicial monitoring and case management for defendants diagnosed with serious mental illness and facing felony charges. If not for the intervention of this specialized court, these defendants would be facing long-term incarceration in our jails and prisons. Support for this program is an essential component of our effort to address the mental health crisis in our City.

I urge the Council to continue supporting the Center's RISE Project which provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence. RISE works to reduce intimate partner violence by engaging individuals who are causing abuse in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior, changing community norms to reduce tolerance for violence, and training credible messengers to identify risk factors for intimate partner violence.

To address the issue of street safety, I support the continuation of the Driver Accountability Program, which seeks to change the risky driving behavior of people charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court, while simultaneously reducing reliance on fines or short-term incarceration for those offenses. The Driver Accountability Program is also addressing more serious cases through a second tier of programming. Circles for Safe Streets, which brings together drivers and their victims through a restorative justice process in cases of serious crashes that have resulted in serious injuries or fatalities.

Finally, the Council should continue and expand support for the Center's Innevative Core Funding. The Center uses this funding to respond to the immediate needs of Brookdyn residents by piloting movel and effective approaches to anti-gun violence, victim services, mental health integrations to diversion, and other pilots to test for scalable solutions.

The Center's long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in Brooklyn to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities align with my office's vision. Together we reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice, aiming to reduce incarceration and conviction wherever possible and build substantial and meaningful community-based supports. I encourage investment in each of the Center's programs to enhance fairness, accountability, and safety for the people of Brooklyn.

Sincerely,

Fin Honzalez

Eric Gonzalez Brooklyn District Attorney

DISTRICT ATTORNEY COUNTY OF NEW YORK ONE HOGAN PLACE New York, N. Y. 10013 (212) 335 5000



February 29, 2024

Speaker Adrience Adams New York City Council City Hall New York, NY 10007

Re: Application for FY 25 City Council Funding

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of City Council,

1 write in support of key Center for Justice Innovation (formerly, Center for Court Innovation) FY25 City Council Applications that will continue to support and expand:

- alternatives to incarceration for more cases
- mental health support.
- restorative justice options
- · carly diversion
- · programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gan violence

These programs will enable Manhattan to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system wherever possible and building public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions. The Center's proposal to assist my office in expanding diversion opportunities for misdemeanor and felony alternatives to incarcention (ATis) across Manhattan are crucial to the administration's coals of maintaining public safety and accountability. The Manhattan Justice Opportunities Felony Alternative to Incarceration program and the Midtown Community Justice Center Misdemeanor Mental Health Court and Emerging Young Adult Court, offer specialized supervision and support for individuals facing felony and misdemeanor charges. By providing interventions and judicial monitoring, we aim to decrease the use of jail and prison sentences and help individuals address the underlying issues driving their behaviors through treatment and social services. These programs have the potential to reduce criminal dispositions and improve outcomes for the participants. For example, funding for the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court will enable the hiring of peers to support participants; a model that has proved successful in that by sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peers assist participants in navigating challenges which ultimately lead to better outcomes. I urge the Council to support these vilal interventions and invest in public safety interventions.

Additionally, funding for the Felony Alternative to Incarceration Program can be used to assess and provide support programming to participants in a more expeditious manner. The more limely an individual receives the necessary support in the community, the more likely they are to succeed. This has the dual effect and benefit of setting them on a better trajectory and improving public safety.

I urge the Council to continue supporting the Center's RISE Project which provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gan violence. RISE works to reduce intimate partner violence by engaging individuals causing harm in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior; changing community nomis to reduce tolerance for violence, and training credible messengers to identify risk factors for intimate partner violence.

To address the issue of street safety, I support the continuation and expansion of the Driver-Accountability Program to provide a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving and work to change the risky driving behavior of people charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court. The Driver Accountability Program is also addressing more serious cases through a second fier of programming. Circles for Safe Streets, which brings together drivers and their victims through a restorative justice process. Finally, the Council should continue and expand support for the Center's Innovative Core Funding. The Centeruses this funding to respond to the immediate needs of Manhattan residents by piloting novel and effective approaches to antigun violence, victim services, mental health integrations to diversion, and other pilots to test for scalable solutions. The Center's long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in Manhattan to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities align with the Manhattan District Attomey's office vision. Together we reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice, aiming to reduce incarcoration and conviction wherever possible and build substantial and meaningful community-based supports; I encourage investment in each of the Center's programs to enhance fairness, accountability, and safety for the people of Manhattan.

Sincerely,

Alvin Bragg District Attorney



DARGEL D. CLARK

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY BRONX COUNTY

February 21, 2024

Speaker Adrienne Adams New York City Council City Itali New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the Bronx District Attorney's Office, I am writing to support the Center for Justice Innovation (CJI or the Center, formerly Center for Court Innovation) FY25 City Council Applications. Funding will sustain existing programs and continue to expand:

- Pre-arraignment early diversion options,
- Mental health supports,
- Restorative justice interventions,
- Human trafficking survivor leadership initiatives,

These programs will enable the Bronx to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the legal system and enhance public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

For the past several years, the City Council has supported the Bronx with \$710,000 to invest in early system diversion, which includes Project Reset, the Center's citywide pre-arraignment diversion model that re-directs New Yorkers with misdemeanor arrests from the court system. The Center also offers same-day at-arraignment diversion services for individuals who were referred to Project Reset Bronx or Bronx HOPE pre-arraignment diversion programming, but who were not contacted or did not complete programming. Any other individuals deemed eligible by court stakeholders also have the opportunity to participate in this at-arraignment diversion program. Upon successful completion of the session, participants' cases are dismissed the same day and they are not required to return to court. This has offered relief from the collateral consequences participants might otherwise experience if arraigned for a low-level crime. We support CII continuing to partner with the Council to implement the next generation of early system diversions for the Brons to continue to lead the City in upstream interventions.

The Bronx County District Attorney's Office partners with the Bronx Child Trauma Support program to support the provision of clinical assessment and treatment of child victims and witnesses to crimes in the Bronx. The continued support of the Council will baseline these direct services conducted through evidenced-based and trauma-informed intervention models designed to prevent or reduce post-traumatic stress symptoms, traumatization, and future victimization. Thanks to meaningful changes in the treatment of trafficking victims in the justice system, the Center's Bronx Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC) referrals continue to decline. As a result, we support CJI's piloting of Project Healing and Empowerment through Advocacy and Leadership (Project HEAL), designed to be a survivor leadership and peer support initiative for human trafficking survivors. Additionally, we support the Center's RISE Project which is used in Family Court and provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence.

To address the issue of street safety, we support the continuation and expansion of the Driver Accountability Program. The essence of this program is to provide a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving and improve the risky driving behavior of people: charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court.

Finally, we support continuation of the Center's Innovative Core Funding which addresses the immediate needs of all boroughs by piloting novel and effective approaches to anti-gun violence, victim services, and mental health integrations to diversions.

The Center has a long and documented history of conducting research and operating direct service programs in the Bronx. Their mission to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities aligns with the Bronx District Attorney's vision and mission to pursue justice with integrity. Together we can reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice by reducing incarceration and convictions as well as by building substantial and meaningful community-based support. I encourage the City Council to consider funding the Center's programs which will ultimately enhance fairness, accountability, and safety for all people in the Bronx.

Darcel D. Clark



#### OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY RICHMOND COUNTY MICHAEL E. MCMAHON DISTRICT ATTORNEY

March 6, 2024

Honorable Adrienne Adams New York City Council Speaker New York City Council City Hall New York, New York 19007

#### RE: Support for Center for Justice Innovation Fiscal Year 2025 Initiatives

#### Dear Speaker Adams and Members of the New York City Council:

As Staten Island's chief law enforcement officer, I write this letter to offer my support for the Center for Justice Innovation ("the Center") and the critical FY25 discretionary funding applications made by their organization to expand alternatives to incarceration opportunities and to provide mental health support, early diversion programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence, restorative re-entry options for individuals and their families, pre-court eviction prevention options, and innovative pilot programs that address pressing needs in communities across the city. Many of these important initiatives and programs will enable Staten Island to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system and building public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

The Center's long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in Staten Island to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities align with my office's vision. My office has proudly partnered with the Center in the development of a Staten Island Community Justice Center purposed to reduce crime and incarceration, and strengthen community trust in justice, while also creating safer, more equitable neighborhoods through community-driven public safety initiatives, youth opportunity, and economic mobility efforts. Staten Island Justice Center staff will continue to maintain existing operations in addition to the continued planning and execution of new programming along with enhanced data collection and evaluation.

Together, we reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice, aiming to reduce incarceration and conviction and build substantial and meaningful community-based supports through innovative courts and alternatives to incarceration programming and services. I strongly encourage investment in each of the programs and areas outlined above to ensure that they can continue this successful work.

130 STUTYVISIANT PLACE - STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK 10301 - TRAFFICINE (718) \$76 6300

#### Honorable Adrienne Adams

I further urge the Council to support Youth Impact Staten Island. The Youth Impact program (formerly Youth Court) is a multi-pronged youth leadership development program focused on peer-led mentorship and violence intervention and prevention practices, with a goal to keep young people in school and out of the criminal legal system, while inspiring community safety and healing from a youth-centered perspective. The program primarily uses a restorative justice model through structured in-school violence intervention partnerships and organized civic engagement. Participants develop hard skills including in oral and written communication, facilitation, conflict resolution and research processes; learn the impact and infrastructure of the justice system; and are trained in community planning and organizing.

Individuals demonstrating persistent and untreated mental illness require access to culturally competent mental health treatment. To address gaps in mental health-related support for court-involved youth in Staten Island, I urge the Council to continue and expand support for the Staten Island Justice Center's Youth Wellness Initiative. This initiative provides vital mental health services that address trauma and promote healing for young people on Staten Island involved in the justice system or at-risk of justice system involvement. Additionally, this initiative is geared towards providing holistic support, to families by supporting the parents and caretakers of youth enrolled in the initiative.

To address the issue of street safety, I support the continuation of the Center's Driver Accountability Program to provide a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving and work to change the risky driving behavior of people charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court.

I also urge the Council to continue supporting the Center's RISE Project, which provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence. RISE works to reduce intimate partner violence by engaging individuals who are causing abuse in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior, changing community norms to reduce the tolerance for violence, and training credible messengers to identify risk factors for intimate partner violence.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this letter as you make important financial determinations on behalf of the City of New York.

Sincerely,

leminda

Michael E. McMahon District Attorney

MEM/aem

130 STUYVINANT PLACE - STATES, ISLAND, NEW YORK 10301 - TELETHONE (718) \$76-6300



Testimony of Julia L. Davis, Esq. Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare Children's Defense Fund-New York 815 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor New York, New York 10017 (212) 697-0882 | www.cdfny.org

Before the Committee on Children and Youth New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028, and The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Submitted March 25, 2024

Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY) thanks the chairs and members of the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to submit written testimony related to the City's FY 2025 Budget and the needs of young people who rely on the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

CDF-NY is a non-profit child advocacy organization that works statewide to ensure every child in New York State has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. As the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund, a national organization with roots in the Civil Rights Movement, we are committed to advancing racial equity and to leveling the playing field for marginalized New York children, youth and families. We envision a City where marginalized youth and families flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. Our policy priorities include racial justice, health equity, child welfare, youth justice, and economic mobility. To learn more about CDF-NY, please visit <u>www.cdfny.org</u>.

CDF-NY is also a part of Project UNITE<sup>1</sup>, a partnership of the Youth Advisory Board at the Coalition for Homeless Youth and YouthNPower: Transforming Care at CDF-NY.<sup>2</sup> Our mission is to transfer power to young people with lived expertise navigating these broken systems to hold leaders accountable, to dismantle silos, and fill the gaps that perpetuate the intersection of the child welfare system and youth homelessness.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> To learn more about UNITE, see: <u>UPDATED PROPOSED NYC RECS 5.26.23 (cdfny.org)</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> To learn more about YouthNPower: Transforming Care, see: <u>YouthNPower – Transforming Care!</u>.

# Issue 1: We must increase access to permanent housing and successful transitions for all young people.

We must make youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of Administration for Children Services (ACS) care permanently, categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter the adult Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. Despite legislation passed by the City Council, the Mayor is refusing to follow the law and permit young people served in the RHY program to access CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter adult shelters. Moreover, young people transitioning out of foster care with ACS were left out of this legislation increasing access to CityFHEPS. This is unacceptable.

The housing crisis in New York City is well-documented among adults and families, but there has been an absence of information focusing on the conditions of transition age youth, and those leaving foster care in particular. New research from YouthNPower shows that young people who have recently aged-out of the child welfare system in New York City face significant challenges finding and maintaining safe and stable housing.<sup>3</sup> Notably, since they aged-out of foster care, **60% report at least one negative or coercive housing experience** (feeling stuck in a bad or dangerous housing situation; sleeping at other people's apartments for short periods of time, "couch-surfing"; living in a hotel, motel, or hostel; living in a shelter, drop-in center, or crisis services program; staying with an abusive family member because they had nowhere else to go; "doubling up" in a home that was not big enough; sleeping outside, for example in a park or on the street; living in a vehicle; sleeping on public transportation or at a bus or train station; doing something they did not want to do in order to have a place to sleep; being evicted; being harassed or taken advantage of by a landlord; or trading sex in exchange for a place to sleep).<sup>4</sup>

Access to vouchers is a critical step for vulnerable young people – may of whom navigate multiple city agencies and systems. For example, among youth aged 18-22 who recently aged-out of foster care in NYC, **nearly 1 in 5 (18%) had lived in a shelter, drop-in center or crisis program** since leaving ACS custody.<sup>5</sup>

There is also an urgent need to increase the number of DYCD Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Programs for homeless young adults ages 18-24. We must create 40 additional beds for youth aged 21-24, and 60 more beds for youth aged 18-21 (total \$5.6M). While young adults cannot be discharged to homelessness from ACS foster care in New York City, we have no parallel protections for young adults in the RHY system. This budget must include increased funding to support supportive settings for young adults coming through RHY services and the DYCD system.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mica Baum-Tuccillo, María Elena Torre, Julia Davis, Maya Tellman, T'coy Adams, Laetitia Brutus, Shania Benjamin, Embraia Fraizer, Christine Joseph, Amal Kharoufi, Ellenie Liang, LaTroya Lovell, Justin Mercado, Mya Martinez, Shauntay Mayfield, Susan Notkin, Denice Ocana, Jose Perez, Chanel Smith, and Grace Tatom. (2024). *"We deserve action, not just words:" Findings of a Survey of Former Foster Youth in New York City.* Available at: <u>2024\_YNP\_SurveyDataBrief\_FINAL.pdf (secureserver.net)</u>. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

# Issue 2: We must expand unconditional direct cash transfer (also known as guaranteed income) opportunities in New York City, especially for system-impacted young people.

Last year, the City Council passed legislation to create a pathway for direct cash transfer (guaranteed income) pilot projects in New York City using City funding. (*See* Title 21, Ch. 10 NYC Admin. Code "Unconditional Direct Cash Assistance.") Unfortunately, no pilot program has been funded with City dollars to date.

Unconditional cash has been shown to be a flexible and effective way to support young people in accessing and maintaining safe and stable housing.<sup>6</sup> It has also been shown to reduce month-to-month income volatility, support full-time employment, and promote health and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> Multiple pilots focusing on system-impacted youth are underway in New York City.<sup>8</sup>

Now is the time to expand unconditional cash support for marginalized youth, especially those who have contact with the runaway and homeless youth system, child welfare and criminal legal system. We should be building a "pilot to policy" bridge to support emerging adults with not only robust services and programs, but the material resources they need to thrive.<sup>9</sup>

## Issue 3: We must ensure that every young person has access to an experienced Housing Navigator/Specialist, who will connect them to all housing resources that they are eligible for, uphold their power of choice, and support them until they move in.

We need to see \$1.5M in the DYCD budget to restore housing navigators for young people in the RHY system. It has never been more important to support young people facing homelessness in New York City. The number of youth relying on DYCD and DHS services has skyrocketed.<sup>10</sup> It is the wrong time to cut resources that are necessary for young adults to access housing benefits and find safe and stable homes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Morton, M. H., Chávez, R., Kull, M. A., Carreon, E. D, Bishop, J., Daferede, S., Wood, E., Cohen, L., & Barreyro, P. (2020). Developing a direct cash transfer program for youth experiencing homelessness: Results of a mixed methods, multi stakeholder design process. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at: <u>Developing-a-Direct-Cash-Transfer-Programfor-Youth.pdf (chapinhall.org)</u>; Berger Gonzalez, S, Morton, M., & Farrell, A. (2022). *Maximizing the impact of direct cash transfers to young people: A policy toolkit.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at: <u>Cash-Transfers-Program-Policy-Toolkit.pdf (chapinhall.org)</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration, Preliminary Analysis, available at: <u>SEED Preliminary+Analysis-</u> <u>SEEDs+First+Year\_Final+Report\_Individual+Pages+.pdf (squarespace.com)</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For example, the YouthNPower: Transforming Care direct cash transfer pilot project (see <u>www.YouthNPower.org</u>).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Mica Baum-Tuccillo, María Elena Torre, Julia Davis, Maya Tellman, T'coy Adams, Laetitia Brutus, Shania Benjamin, Embraia Fraizer, Christine Joseph, Amal Kharoufi, Ellenie Liang, LaTroya Lovell, Justin Mercado, Mya Martinez, Shauntay Mayfield, Susan Notkin, Denice Ocana, Jose Perez, Chanel Smith, and Grace Tatom. (2024). *"We deserve action, not just words:" Findings of a Survey of Former Foster Youth in New York City.* Available at: <u>2024 YNP SurveyDataBrief FINAL.pdf (secureserver.net)</u>.
<sup>10</sup> Hogan, Gwynne. Mar. 12, 2024. <u>Youth Shelter System Locks Out Hundreds as Migrants Seek Entry | THE CITY — NYC News</u>.

# Issue 4: We must ensure that young people have appropriate supports and resources in the community to stay permanently (long-term) housed.

While youth who have left foster care can go back to their foster care agency until they are 26 for individualized coaching and case management through Fair Futures, young people in the runaway and homeless youth system have no access to these kinds of services.

As we move toward creating trusted, community-based resources for all youth facing homelessness, we need to make critical investments right now in the RHY drop-in centers. To meet the urgent need facing youth in New York City now, the budget must include a one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers (\$1.63M). And we must also restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System (\$1.6M).

# Issue 5: We must restore cuts and make deeper investments in adolescents and emerging adults to reduce contact with the criminal legal system and the number of youth in detention.

As you saw at the December 2023 joint committee hearing, young people from across the City are demanding that we **#InvestDontArrest** to support their wellbeing and community safety. The increases in juvenile detention at Crossroads and Horizon require the City Council and the Administration to act immediately to restore and grow programs for young people with criminal legal system contacts, including alternative to detention services that will permit more young people to go home. Cuts to programs like ARCHES, Project Impact and Next Steps through the Department of Probation, as well as intensive family therapy and case management through community-based organizations like Esperanza, diminish our ability to serve young people in their own communities. As the FY2025 budget is negotiated and finalized, the Committee should explore whether ACS can help fill the gap by directly funding alternative to detention/incarceration, mentoring, family therapy, and intensive case management programs in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this written testimony. For any questions, please reach out to me directly: JDavis@childrensdefense.org



## Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth FY25 Preliminary Budget Hearing, Friday, March 22, 2024

Chair Stevens and Committee Members,

Since 1995, Children's Rights has been a national advocate for youth in state systems. We are also a member of the New York City Jails Action Coalition. Our experience with adolescents and young adults in foster care and juvenile legal systems often brings us into contact with young adult and youth corrections policy, as our clients are disproportionately represented in young adult and juvenile correction facilities. We advocate on behalf of young adults, 18- to 21-years old, incarcerated on Rikers Island.

New York City's young adults need the Council's help.

New York City operates the most over-staffed and excessively-funded jail system in the country. In 2021 alone, New York City spent three times as much per incarcerated person than the second most expensive jail system in the country.<sup>1</sup> This amounts to over \$556,000 per incarcerated person per year.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the enormous sums poured into the City's jails, countless reports show that incarcerated persons are subjected to some of the most dangerous, degrading, and inhumane conditions in the country.<sup>3</sup> Officers are still not showing up for work, and people have been going without showers and food and are left in their cells for hours on end. We need look no further than the *Nunez* monitor's regular reports detailing unnecessary and excessive force, and the February 28, 2024 report filed in *Benjamin v. Molina* describing vermin infestation and other sanitary violations on Rikers. Serving time on the Island can also be a death sentence: since Mayor Adams took office, 30 incarcerated people have lost their lives on Rikers.<sup>4</sup>

For all these reasons and more, Rikers must close by August 2027 in accordance with the law. Yet Mayor Adams's proposed budget will undoubtedly reduce the chances of this happening by cutting \$27.8 million for the very programs that help reduce the jails' population: alternatives to incarceration, supervised release, and re-entry services. The Administration's proposed budget also fails to adequately fund essential community resources that could keep young adults and others out of the criminal legal system in the first place: supportive housing, community mental health services, and education in our schools. If properly funded, all of these programs and services could reduce the burgeoning population on the Island and hasten its closure.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-cost-of-incarceration-per-person-in-new-york-city-skyrockets-</u> to-all-time-high-2/ The most recent available data show that more than 86% of incarcerated persons on Rikers are there pre-

trial, nearly 55% have mental health conditions, and over 90% are people of color. <u>https://greaterjusticeny.vera.org/nycjail/</u> <u>https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-rikers-island-report-reveals-graphic-details-about-unsanitary-conditions-fire-safety-and-ventilation-systems/; https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/01/11/detainees-request-clean-laundry--report-unsanitary-conditions-on-</u>

rikers#:~:text=%22They%20don%27t%20have%20soap,%2C%20to%20wash%20their%20clothes.%22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>https://www.vera.org/news/second-death-on-rikers-island-in-2024-brings-new-york-city-jail-death-toll-to-30-under-mayor-adams#:~:text=He%20is%20the%20second%20person,basic%20safety%20in%20its%20jails</u>

The cuts that the Administration is proposing will uniquely affect young adults incarcerated on Rikers Island. Evidence shows that incarceration reduces youth's success in education and employment, and also leads to lasting damage to their health and well-being.<sup>5</sup> Evidence also shows that alternatives to incarceration lead to better outcomes for youth and adolescents, all while costing far less than incarceration.<sup>6</sup> Reducing funding for alternatives to confinement and re-entry services makes no sense morally, ethically, or fiscally.

There is still time for Mayor Adams to change course. For example, the City can deliver on its promise to open 380 units of Justice Involved Supportive Housing, a model that has been widely successful in reducing jail, shelter, and hospital stays, and generates significant cost savings.<sup>7</sup>

Negotiating changes to the proposed budget provides an opportunity for the Council to move the City in the right direction, while also rightsizing the expenditure of taxpayer dollars. Instead of allocating \$2.6 billion to the Department of Correction, the Council should reduce the Department's uniform headcount, eliminate vacancies, and hold staff accountable for chronic absenteeism. (This last effort would also help reduce overtime spending on the staff who do show up for work.) We urge the Council to provide funding for crucial programs and services to divert our young people and adults from jail, and that keep them from continued system involvement. We also urge the Council to fund the Board of Correction adequately so it can provide meaningful oversight of Rikers until it closes.

The more than half a million dollars it costs to incarcerate someone for a year on Rikers can and must be used instead to fund programs that are proven not only to result in better health and well-being for our young people, but also to actually increase public safety. Surely, both incarcerated young adults and New York City taxpayers deserve better, and better for their money. Surely the City Council can see its way clear to reducing the cruelty and degradation that define our criminal legal system.

The budget in its current state does not properly allocate funding toward any of the goals Children's Rights and advocates have outlined today and in other committee hearings. We look to you and Speaker Adams to negotiate a fair, just, and reasonable budget that serves all New Yorkers, including young adults and adults on Rikers, and expedites closure of the Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Joll.

Daniele Gerard Senior Staff Attorney dgerard@childrensrights.org

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> <u>https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> <u>https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Reduce-Homelessness-for-People-Impacted-by-the-Criminal-Legal-System.pdf</u>



## New York City Council City Preliminary Budget Hearing - Children and Youth Services Committee Submitted Testimony prepared by Dante Bravo, Senior Policy Analyst

## Friday, March 22nd, 2024

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Althea Stevens and the members of the Children and Youth Services committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the fiscal year 2025 preliminary city budget. Thank you to the New York City Council for your leadership on issues that impact the youth and families of New York City (NYC).

With a mission to help children living in poverty to succeed and thrive, Children's Aid provides comprehensive supports to children, youth, and their families in some of the most under-resourced neighborhoods in New York City. Since our founding in 1853, Children's Aid has been anchored in the knowledge that poverty cannot be overcome with a single service delivered at a single point in time. We are a solutions-driven, multi-service agency employing a holistic strategy that serves children and their families at every stage of development, from cradle through college and career; and in every key setting — home, school, and community.

Today our nearly 2,000 full and part time staff members empower 50,000 children, youth and their families through our citywide child welfare and family services and our network of 40 locations, including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers and community health clinics in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

A healthy New York City requires a robust ecosystem of programs for children, youth, and their families. The human services sector is invaluable to the city's social safety net. Human services providers and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) like Children's Aid stand in the gaps, partnering with government to ensure our communities remain resilient and vibrant. We support the city's continued recovery from the lingering effects of the pandemic. We care for children on a daily basis and support families in meeting their basic needs. Despite our essential service provision, our work is threatened by governmental decisions that uniquely impact CBOs. Our ability to remain fiscally solvent and operate on a daily basis is consistently undermined by procurement, contracting, background check policies, RFPs, and funding decisions at the city and state levels.

These systemic challenges constrain our ability to focus on programs and service delivery. Children's Aid, a large anchor institution with 170 years in the community, is often hindered and negatively impacted



by these sector-wide challenges. This makes it even more clear to us how smaller organizations that do critical work in so many communities are made incredibly vulnerable by these challenges.

### **Supporting Mandated Services**

As a NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) contracted foster care provider, Children's Aid supports families through a continuum of services. We provide preventive, family, therapeutic and medical foster care, and adoption services. In 2023, we served 879 youth in family-based foster homes and completed 39 adoptions and 51 kinship adoptions. We also served 2,405 families in our preventive services programs in Central Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

A qualified foster care workforce is essential to deliver mandated services effectively. Our goal is to keep children and youth safe and support families' varied needs. However, we are experiencing a staff shortage like many human services providers. We currently have an estimated 27% vacancy rate in our foster care division and are tirelessly working to find innovative ways to attract new staff, such as using a recruitment agency. Unfortunately, we are competing with corporate companies, hospitals, and city agencies that can pay between \$15,000 and \$30,000 more than we can offer in salaries. In light of these drastic pay disparities, the use of such tools as recruitment agencies has been an essential approach in decreasing our vacancy rate this past year. However, the cost of these tools is not covered by our contracts.

Even with significant progress in decreasing our vacancy rate, continued turnover puts our ability to deliver quality services at risk. The lack of staff also impacts the time a youth or child remains in care. Research shows that each time a case manager changes, youth will stay in care for an additional 6-18 months as new staff members are trained and become familiar with their cases.

### Strengthening Supports for Youth with a Foster Care Background

In an effort to advance support for youth with a foster care background, Children's Aid is proud to be a member of Fair Futures, a coalition of over 100 human services organizations focused on supporting young people in and aging out of foster care.

At our Next Generation Center in the South Bronx, Children's Aid operates a Fair Futures program with 242 youth from across the five boroughs (ages 11 - 20). NGC is a community center and Boys and Girls Club serving approximately 300 youth (ages 14 - 26). At the heart of our coaching and foster youth transitional services are trusting and caring relationships. We understand that a sustained relationship is critical to our young people feeling safe, secure, and supported to succeed. This work is focused on two primary goals: 1) connecting youth to positive influences (school, work,



relationships with caring adults); and 2) diverting youth from negative influences (crime, incarceration).

We applaud the City for its baselining of Fair Futures and ask that the City Council ensure funding for It remains intact. It has proven to be an effective program for thousands of young people who have experienced foster care and/or the juvenile justice system.

Additionally, Children's Aid houses the Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA). FYSA is a statewide advocacy group that promotes responsive policies and programs that offer young people with a foster care background every opportunity to strive for and achieve their goals. We appreciate the City Council's partnership on our annual City Council Foster Youth Shadow Day. We look forward to continuing this partnership as it introduces young people to city government and allows them to share their personal experiences of the foster care system with elected officials.

## **Investing in Youth Programming**

According to a national study from the Afterschool Alliance, nine in ten parents of afterschool students report their afterschool program gives their child time to interact with peers and build social skills; 82% say it helps build their confidence; 73% say it helps their child learn responsible decision-making. Regular attendance in a high-quality afterschool program is also linked to higher scores on standardized tests and improved school attendance. Evidence affirms what providers know from experience to be true: that the programs provided by CBOs in partnership with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) must be well-funded and accessible.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget includes cuts to various youth-facing programs, including a **\$6.9 million** cut to COMPASS afterschool programs, which would eliminate services for 3,538 youth, and a **\$19.64 million** cut to Summer Rising programs for middle school youth, which would eliminate Friday programming in the summer that would allow for deeper enrichment and engagement.

While Children's Aid can recognize the need for fiscal responsibility in a time of economic instability, these cuts are not the way to demonstrate to children and families that they are the city's priority. To do that, Children's Aid recommends the following:

- Expedite payment of any outstanding contract backlogs from FY21, FY22, or FY23 for any DYCD contracted program, including Summer Rising.
  - Prioritize the timely payment of contracts for all FY25 programming, including the possibility of advance payments.
- Prioritize the needs of our afterschool workforce, including the need for higher wages, cost of living adjustments, and flexible contracts.



- Immediately release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the SONYC/COMPASS system by the end of calendar year 2024 as well as restoring the \$6.9 million cut to the COMPASS system and instead fund the current capacity of the larger afterschool system.
  - This proposed cut initiates a cycle of defunding afterschool programming and does not consider the need for an RFP to update rates, which have not been updated since the program's inception in 2014.
- Restore the \$19.64 million cut to Summer Rising in DYCD programming.
  - This testimony also includes additional recommendations so that the city can address the various operational issues standing in the way of Summer Rising living up to its full potential for children and families.
- Invest enough resources to clear the backlog and expedite the Department Of Health and Mental Hygiene Comprehensive (DOHMH) Background Check process so providers can quickly fill vacant positions with qualified candidates in youth programs.

## Contracts and procurement must be on time

Human service providers continue to face delayed contracting issues, which harm both the organizations and the communities we serve. The city pays providers once the contracts are registered, creating a risky situation where we either have to start the work without a payment or delay in starting the contract, which affects the communities dependent on the services of providers. Delays on the city's end stress nonprofits' financial sustainability and jeopardize the quality of services by diverting funds away from programs to pay interest on lines of credit.

The city needs to do more, both in investing in contracts and in fixing systemic issues that increase late registration. Nonprofits are forced to compensate for delays by taking out loans, laying off staff, and, at times, scaling back or closing programs. Additionally, delays in registration or in processing contract amendments can mean that we are unable to spend down all the money on a contract. For example, if programming is delayed until a contract is registered, the program starts late, jeopardizing the program's ability to spend an entire year's worth of program funds. In other instances, if an amendment is processed late, providers are less likely to have the flexibility to shift funds to meet the need of the program. These delays impact providers and have a ripple effect on the communities we serve. Therefore, we call on the city to pay all outstanding contract backlogs from FY21, FY22, and FY23 for any DYCD contracted program, including Summer Rising. It is crucial that the city register contracts and reimburse providers in a timely fashion, especially for them to operate summer programs.



#### Prioritize retention of youth services staff

Children's Aid, like other providers, is experiencing high turnover rates for front-line staff – including social workers, teachers, education professionals, and mental health professionals – to agencies and sectors that offer more pay. The current contracts do not compensate youth workers adequately and allow providers to remain competitive. DYCD must invest resources and assist providers in implementing staff retention strategies. Without retention bonuses, professional development opportunities, and other incentives, providers cannot compete in this challenging labor market. A departure of youth workers from the field will directly and negatively impact the youth and families we serve.

Human services workers are overwhelmingly female (66%), over two-thirds are full-time workers of color (68%), and nearly half (46%) are women of color. Investing in this workforce also addresses racial and gender wage gaps and uplifts thousands of New Yorkers close to the poverty line. Currently, government contracts either directly set low salary levels or indirectly establish low rates for services along with required staffing levels on a contract. While we thank the Administration and Council for the recent \$741M investment in human services workers across the next three years, **this is a starting point** towards equitable wages for our workforce. City contracts for social services must provide a living wage for human services workers, ensuring that they can support themselves and their families while fulfilling their vital roles in our community.

### Release next COMPASS/SONYC Request for Proposals (RFP)

Communities *deserve* the highest quality programs. That is made possible when providers receive contracts that are responsive to their community's needs and recognize the cost of living in New York City in 2024. The upcoming COMPASS/SONYC RFP represents an opportunity to provide high-quality programming, living wages, and better outcomes for providers and communities. These contracts have not seen an update since 2014, when they were first instituted. In 2018 a new RFP process was introduced. Children's Aid, along with the Campaign for Children, flagged that there were serious issues with their budget model. Providers have, time and time again, shared budget models with the agency with a higher, more realistic per-participant rate.

DYCD decided to pull the RFP in 2018, but still engaged with providers on how we can come to the ideal per-participant rate, but partially due to the pandemic, that conversation stalled. While the conversations with providers have stalled, the need for new contracts has not. In fact, it has intensified, given the rising cost of living in New York City.



This is also why restoring the **\$6.9 million cut** to the COMPASS system is imperative. The field cannot sustain a cut of this size. Sites across the system have waitlists and are unable to enroll students because of the many issues with staffing, background checks, and more. Instead, we call on the city to fund the current capacity of the COMPASS/SONYC system and commit to an RFP that has rates that reflect the many budget models submitted to DYCD by experts in the field. These documents must be **the starting off point** for rates, not aspirational goals.

Children's Aid calls on the city to release a new RFP for the COMPASS/SONYC system as soon as possible, if not by the end of the calendar year 2024. Our communities have waited too long for better services, and every day we delay is a delay in services. We look forward to working with the city to enact fair rates.

#### **Summer Rising**

In addition to reversing the cut for Summer Rising, the city must address the many challenges facing the success of this program. If the operational issues were resolved, and there was greater collaboration between DYCD, providers, and New York City Public School (NYCPS), the Summer Rising model could be a resounding success.

<u>Families were clamoring last year for seats within the Summer Rising program.</u> Over 45,000 young people were denied a seat last year because of a lack of capacity, and we have an opportunity to do better this year. Summer Rising has laid bare our communities' need for high-quality summer enrichment for their young people. The city owes our families and young people smart investments and expert youth development, and to do that, Children's Aid recommends the following:

- Plan far in advance and incorporate parent choice: There must be a dedicated full-time team of staff working on Summer Rising. This is critical for providers and their planning and for parents, youth, and school staff. By February, parents should know what summer options are, and schools and youth services providers can assess what young people need in terms of support. These actions ensure that we create programs that meet the needs and desires of young people. Our young people have diverse needs; therefore, their programming options should be diverse to meet those needs. From our previous experience, we know that some youth need summer programming that is more like summer camp, and some need more academic support. We can design options that are responsive and integrate youth needs and parent choice.
- **Contracting delays must be resolved:** We call on the city to immediately fulfill payment of all outstanding contracts for work done in Summer 2021 and 2022. Contracts must be registered promptly and with as little back-and-forth with providers as possible. We support



the Mayor's commitment to creating the Office of Nonprofit Services to alleviate these issues. Moving forward, all contracts should be year-round 12-month contracts to make the procurement process as efficient as possible.

- Return enrollment to DYCD. DYCD-controlled enrollment will help providers adequately plan for and hire staff appropriately. Additionally, many families were not able to access programs with the providers who had previously served them. This kept DYCD providers from maintaining consistent relationships and supporting families known to providers. In previous iterations of summer programming consistency was a great asset to young people and families. This also supported the continuity of learning and academics between schools, CBO partners, and youth.
- Salary parity for summer providers: Cornerstones and Beacons are open for more hours in the summer, but received lower reimbursement rates than their school counterparts during Summer Rising. Many providers, like Children's Aid, have multiple contracts with DYCD that include center-based programs and school-based, and as a result received inequitable funding across contracts. One of the biggest successes from the last two summers of Summer Rising was our ability to serve more young people than ever in summer programming, and a considerable amount of the programming was very creative. The rates that providers received were far closer to the actual cost of programming than previous summer rates, and those higher rates should remain and remain consistent across all summer programs.

### Clear the fingerprinting and staff clearances backlog

The city must clear the current Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) clearance backlog for child care and youth service providers and their staff by targeting resources and adding additional staff to focus solely on the clearance process. In addition to the difficult labor market and the continued low wages in our city contracts, the delay and backlog in background checks has impacted our staffing shortages.

The backlog is so severe that we struggle to have enough fully cleared staff to supervise provisionally cleared staff. The backlog directly interferes with our ability to serve youth and families, forcing us to put some enrolled families on a waitlist for afterschool programs. It is imperative to the continued success of the youth services field for DOHMH to be fully resourced and supported in whatever way is needed in order to clear the backlog as soon as possible.

### Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)



We applaud the historic expansion of the enormously impactful Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget, an exciting step forward in actualizing youth employment opportunities in our communities. We applaud the Mayor and the Council for their continued support of SYEP. To build on this success, Children's Aid recommends the following:

- Metro Cards for SYEP participants must be funded on an ongoing basis. This critical resource allows our youth to fully participate in SYEP programming.
- Some SYEP participants have childcare needs and should be considered for childcare waivers and other resources to support their participation.
- The city should consider incentives that can support employer engagement efforts.
- Expand slots for a SYEP partnership with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).
- Allow younger youth to earn an hourly wage instead of a stipend.
  - \$700 is no longer a competitive incentive for our younger youth, which hurts overall program utilization (as participants will often opt for a different opportunity).
- For participants who may not be ready or able to work a full 25 hours per week, DYCD should consider making an allowance for a Professional Technical Development up to 100% (it is currently 50%) at the provider's discretion.
  - This would be an added support, particularly for older youth with no work experience, as this population needs additional, targeted support.
  - More ongoing and year-round planning with all the stakeholders is needed for all special initiatives.
- More resources and partnerships related to AI and potential career pathways.

As an agency committed to eradicating poverty in our neighborhoods, we will do all we can to advocate, protect, and increase funding for the most under-resourced youth and families in NYC. Children's Aid is a member of the Campaign for Children, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the New York State Community Schools Network, the New York City Coalition for Community Schools Excellence, the Human Services Council, the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), and Fair Futures. As a member of these networks and alliances, we support their policy agendas.

We understand the challenges the city faces in meeting the needs of its young people, but our budget cannot be balanced at the expense of our children and families. Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for their vigorous support of children, youth, families, and communities in New York City, and we look forward to continuing to partner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these crucial issues. Please feel free to contact me at dbravo@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



## Chinese-American Planning Council Testimony Before the Committee on Children and Youth Chair, Council Member Althea Stevens March 22nd, 2024

Thank you Chair Stevens and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Erika Enchuategui and I'm a Provider Specialist for Early Childhood Learning and Wellness program at the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC). The mission of CPC is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

Across the city, <u>"126,500 children under the age five rely on city-contracted early childhood programs</u> or use vouchers for subsidized care." CPC operates six early childhood centers through contracts with the NYC Department of Education (DOE), serving over 310 children ages 0-4. While the 2022 fiscal year ended on June 30th and auditors have begun their work, the DOE has only paid CPC 35% of our FY22 contracted amount. This includes 25% of our advance and 10% contingency, so the DOE owes CPC over \$4.6 million.

This is a huge disruption to children's academic journey, families, and the staff of these programs. CPC's Early Childhood and School Age Centers are critical safety nets for thousands of working-class, AAPI, and immigrant families. In addition to providing childcare for low-income families, CPC's Childhood Development Services (CDS) staff are instrumental in supporting the growth of children of color with disabilities. During COVID-19, when schools closed and services shifted to a remote setting, CPC's CDS staff continued to provide their services nonstop, and creatively integrated their programming onto an online format. They are recognized as essential and vital to the reopening of New York City, but this recognition was only in words. It is imperative that the City immediately pay these programs what they are owed to ensure children are receiving their quality education and that program staff are properly compensated.

CBO's are funded disproportionately to their counterparts in DOE. We are contracted to serve NYC children under the same capacity; to educate with the same curriculum, credentials, assessments and requirements. It is unethical that the DOE is not equitable in parity still. Support staff without longevity are paid a mere 70 cents above minimum wage due to the contract negotiated with the

<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Street New York, NY 10012 t: 212.941.0920 f: 212.966.8581 www.cpc-nyc.org



City. We are seeing an exodus of staff from the Child care system, due to the disparity, many have left for substitute positions within DOE, which pays a rate of \$33 an hour.

In addition to CPC's Early Childhood and School Age Centers, CPC holds contracts with DOE to operate Family Child Care (FCC) Networks in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. The Networks assist low-income and immigrant families in applying for subsidized child care and help parents find high-quality in-network home-based programs for infants, toddlers, and 3-K children.

Pay rates for child care programs affiliated with Family Child Care Networks are dictated by DOE/ACS and do not promote equity within the industry. All home-based child care providers have been able to provide 3-K services after Mayor De Blasio expanded 3-K for All, which meant that all families living in NYC were eligible to apply for free 3-K services from 8AM-2:20PM September through June. However, if a parent needed extended hours and an extended school year for their child, they would have to apply for a subsidy through the City and be found eligible for the 8AM-6PM care, which includes the summer months. Child care providers are paid a rate of \$37 per 3-K child a day, regardless if they attend from 8AM-2:20PM or 8AM-6PM.

Although they provide high quality instruction to 3-K children with subsidy cases for an extra 3 hours and 40 minutes compared to 3-K children without a subsidy case, they are not compensated extra for those hours. This discourages providers from accepting children with subsidy cases due to the providers' difficulty in making ends meet in an ever-increasing rent market alongside paying for daycare expenses, and would thus rather find families who can afford to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars a month. This in turn impacts the most vulnerable by increasing difficulty in securing child care to work and provide for their families.

The low pay rate to providers fuels their challenge in staying open. These are educators who also follow the DOE curriculum, participate in professional learning opportunities, and follow DOH health and safety regulations. One permanently closed program means one less program in a community, effectively robbing one of parents' and childrens' most vital resources. We will be investing in our children when we invest in our home-based programs and centers. We urge the City to make equitable investment towards Pay Parity for the staff within Center Based Organizations and further investment towards an increase in child rates for home-based child care providers.

The lack of support and funding from the city has made it even more challenging to implement creative programming that meets the learning and developmental needs of children during COVID-19, and this has resulted in concerning childhood developmental regression.

The following anecdotal example of childhood regression is about a child with disabilities who enrolled in one of CPC's Childhood Centers when she was two years old. When she enrolled in the program, she was unable to speak any words. Through CPC's support, she was able to speak coherent sentences at three years old. When COVID-19 hit and services shifted to remote, this child was unable to access their teletherapy sessions due to the language, digital, and financial barriers that her family encountered. Once CPC's Childhood Center reopened this fall, this child returned and was unable to speak in coherent sentences anymore. In six months, she had regressed two developmental years - back to speaking single word phrases.

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Children with disabilities require paras (paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities with communication, instructional, and behavioral support), Currently there is a severe shortage in special needs staff (SEIT, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, ABA therapists, Speech Therapists to support children. It is hard to get support for children normally but to also ask for linguistic and culturally competent support for these children and families, it is close to impossible. Disproportionately affecting working class immigrant parents, as well as affecting majority working class and Communities of Color, the lack of accountable follow through with providing support staff is yet another systemic barrier that prevents working-class children of color from learning. These systemic inequities impact low-income children of color and children with disabilities, and immigrant-serving CBOs such as CPC end up taking on the mantle to support these children through interruptions to their cognitive development.**CPC calls for equitable investment in community-led Early Childhood services, the integration of intentional community outreach for families with linguistic barriers, and provision of support to search for providers, relying on word of mouth and for community-based childhood centers to adequately support low-income immigrant families with children who have disabilities.** 

The COVID-19 pandemic has also been detrimental to children's mental health, which affects their academic performance and long term development. The disruption from in person learning and prolonged isolation has increased students' stress and anxiety. Fourth graders in CPC programs are asking questions such as, "what if it stays like this forever, what if my parents die, what if we don't have any more money, why...why do I need to...nothing will change," and they breakdown in tears from sadness and frustration trying to get answers. The overwhelming sense of uncertainty, grief, and hopelessness weigh heavily on students' minds, leaving them unmotivated and unable to focus in the classroom. Additionally, students carry onto their families' pain and loss, and are unable to receive the proper mental health support to fully process and heal from their traumas. CPC staff are not professionally trained to provide the comprehensive mental health support students need, and may experience vicarious trauma from consoling students as well. Additionally, many staff are living through the same stress, anxiety, and dilemmas the children are feeling. Social Services workers need to be better trained and equipped on what signs to look for in mental illness specifically in young children, in addition to how to address it appropriately. CPC calls on the City to ensure CBO's receive the same equitable support in mental health for the children they serve as the DOE.

During COVID-19, AAPI unemployment claims have increased by 6900% in comparison to last year. Lines for free meal distribution events wrap around the block, and CPC staff have supported thousands of families navigate through different relief programs provided by City, State, and Federal level governments. At CPC's Early Childhood sites, without an increase in funding from the City, any increase in meal distribution comes out of the individual site's program budget. The children would rely on the organization and agency's own resources to get fed, rather than from the City they live in. **Therefore, CPC demands increased investment funding for CBO-run Early Childcare Centers, which provide necessary childcare services for working-class immigrant families.** 

COVID-19 has exacerbated systemic injustices and has left many of our low-income and immigrant families without adequate resources to navigate unemployment and surface-level relief packages. CPC staff remain on the frontlines of the essential workforce, and have prepared and adapted to the ever-shifting policies throughout the past six months. However, critical information is still getting lost



through the cracks, and CBOs such as CPC are left out of crucial communication around school guidelines.

Updates are not reaching CBOs in a timely manner, but there is also no transparency regarding current allocated funds or current issues within the vendor portal system. We continue to face confusion as new protocols, guidelines and procedures are provided but information is not guided and we do not always have a point person to get answers from. By not ensuring a grace/transition period for the change. Example: This year they provided an update on timeliness of ensuring our invoices are in the system, we must certify our student attendance by the 5th of the following month. This means my Sept 2022 attendance needs to be certified by Oct 5th. However, DOE's Vendor Portal was not active for FY 2023 until after August 15th, 2022, this ultimately meant uploading enrollments was delayed until after August 15. DOE still did not start processing our student enrollment package until this week, which means without the enrollments approved July 2022 attendance is inaccurate and we are unable to claim the accurate amount from DOE. It is currently October 2022, and yet we are still receiving deadline notifications but we are unable to reclaim any funding for this year's service thus far. Due to the community in which we service, we understand our working class immigrant families need holistic support with transitioning their kids back to learning. including culturally competent and language accessible mental health services, investment in youth employment, funding towards Community Schools, and more. However, these programs will not reach working class immigrants without proper communication from DOE to CBO providers that serve marginalized communities. The delays and hurdles faced by CBO's make it harder for leadership to focus on the needs of the children. DOE needs to provide transparency, also enough support and update their system timely, their delays cause us to chase for information and for change that is impossible.

Therefore, the City needs to pay CBO providers for the service currently being provided, and treat CBO's with equal respect. The City also must hold DOE accountable to providing communications in a timeline that allows for CBOs to respond and prepare sustainable quality programming that NYC children deserve.

Furthermore, CPC is one of the organizations that has partnered with Promise NYC to ensure that undocumented children are receiving the care and support that they need. CPC focuses on serving Queens-based applicants and selecting eligible families based on their income, children's ages, and immigration status. Undocumented families in Queens with children ages 6 weeks to 13 years old and earn less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to apply to this program through CPC. We have enrolled over 200 community members into the program and many more have expressed interest. However, they have been unfortunately placed on the waitlist as we were told by the City to cap enrollment and did not know about renewal.

During a time where we are seeing an influx of migrants entering our city, we need to live up to our values and provide the resources needed as a sanctuary for our immigrant communities. These families have been forced by socio-political factors beyond their control to flee violence, unrest, and dire circumstances in their home countries in search of a safe and stable future for their children.

<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Street | New York, NY 10012 | t: 212.941.0920 | f: 212.966.8581 | www.cpc-nyc.org



The families that we serve need to access employment in order to sustain themselves and contribute to our city. In order to work, parents need affordable childcare. Access to affordable child care saves lives and creates futures.

One mother enrolled in our program explained that she and her children came to the US in order to escape life-threatening shortages of medications that they faced in Venezuela. Her oldest child would have died without access to medications and treatment. There was no time to wait for immigration processes. Now, undocumented in the US and seeking asylum, she is relying on PromiseNYC so that she can access childcare for her children, and thus access employment and income to support her family while also making sure that her oldest child receives the medical attention that he needs. This is just one of many stories.

In summary, we call on the City to consider the following:

- Ensure that city contracts with Early Childhood programs are paid in full.
- Make equitable investment towards Pay Parity for the staff within Center Based Organizations and further investment towards an increase in child rates for home-based child care providers.
- Make equitable investment in community-led Early Childhood services, the integration of intentional community outreach for families with digital and linguistic barriers, and provision of training on school reopening guidelines for community-based childhood centers to adequately support low-income immigrant families as NYC schools reopen.
- Ensure CBO's receive the same equitable support in mental health for the children they serve as the DOE.
- Increase investment funding for CBO-run Early Childcare Centers, which provide necessary childcare services for working-class immigrant families.
- Needs to pay CBO providers equitably with DOE teachers, and treat them with equal respect. The City also must hold DOE accountable to providing language-accessible communications in a timeline that allows for CBOs to respond and prepare for the quality programming that NYC children deserve.
- Pass Universal Childcare so that all children regardless of immigration status are able to access quality and comprehensive care and in the meantime allocate \$20 million to Promise NYC in this upcoming budget.

Our Early Childhood Programs are a lifeline to many of our low-income and immigrant communities, and we urge the City to take into consideration these recommendations. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify.

Thank you so much for your time and if there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy Analyst at <u>achen9@cpc-nyc.org</u>.



## Testimony by

### Coalition for Homeless Youth

on

The FY25 Children and Youth Preliminary Budget

Submitted to

The New York City Council's Committee on Children and Youth Services

By

Jamie Powlovich Executive Director Coalition for Homeless Youth

Verbal Testimony Given: March 22, 2024 Written Testimony Submitted: March 25, 2024

#### Introduction

The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) welcomes the opportunity to submit written testimony for the Children and Youth Services Committees' FY2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing. CHY was disappointed that the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) did not adequately amplify the needs of their contracted Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers during their testimony. However, we greatly appreciate the Council's support in highlighting their needs during their questioning of DYCD.

As stated during our verbal testimony on March 22, 2024, we are submitting this written testimony to amplify the needs of the DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, and the runaway and homeless youth that they serve.

#### Who are Runaway and Homeless Youth?

RHY are generally defined as unaccompanied young people who have run away or been forced to leave home and now reside in temporary situations, places not otherwise intended for habitation, or emergency shelters. The federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act defines the population as being between 12-24 years of age. As of April 2017, New York State redefined RHY to be anyone under the age of 25 years<sup>1</sup>.

On a single night in 2023, 5,927 unaccompanied and parenting youth under age 25 were counted as experiencing homelessness in the NYC Point in Time (PIT) count.<sup>2</sup> In NYC Fiscal Year 2023, 3,182 RHY, were served in DYCD RHY residential programs, including 326 minors.<sup>3</sup> 37,125 RHY received nonresidential services at a DYCD RHY drop-in center or through street-outreach<sup>4</sup>. In 2021, DHS reported a total of 4,051 unaccompanied or parenting youth between the ages of 18 and 25 entering either single adult or family shelters,<sup>5</sup> and the Department of Education (DOE) reported that during the 2019-2020 school year, almost 7,500 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness attended NYC public schools.<sup>6</sup>

Like all other segments of NYC's homeless population, RHY experience harm that disproportionately impacts their health and creates roadblocks to long-term wellness. This is most recently detailed in "Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)."<sup>7</sup> In the OSH report, it details the myriad of harms that confront RHY, include: increased mental health problems and trauma, substance use, exposure to victimization and criminal activity, and unsafe sex practices. More specifically that almost 50% of youth served at New York State RHY programs reported needing mental health services, and in NYC over 90% of homeless youth have reported experiencing trauma, 92% self-reported having anxiety or depression, 69% reported using drugs and 60% specifically self-reported that they had been diagnosed with having bipolar disorder.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, homeless youth also experience increased levels of criminalization and discrimination due to their intersecting identities. In NYC, over 90% of homeless youth identify as a race other than white (non-Hispanic) and LGBTQ/TGNC youth are also overrepresented in the RHY population<sup>9</sup>.

#### Youth-Specific Shelters and Services Make a Measurable, Positive Difference

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has been designated the county youth bureau for NYC and is responsible for serving RHY under the NYRHYA.<sup>10</sup> While many RHY also seek services within the DHS and HRA continuum of shelters, homeless youth, advocates, and RHY providers agree that the outcomes for many homeless youth improve with increased access to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EXC/A19-H

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC PopSub CoC NY-600-2023 NY 2023.pdf <sup>3</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY23 LL86 RHY Demographics-and-Services Report-Final.pdf

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> New York State FY 2018-19 budget included amendments to the NYRHYA that expand the age range for RHY services and youth-centered beds to 25 years old. The amendments took effect January 1, 2018. (SFY 2018-19 Budget, Part M S2006-c/30060c; see https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/press/2017/pressRelease17\_enactedPassage.html.

youth-specific shelters and services. This was proved in a groundbreaking white paper was released by the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing in with the Coalition for Homeless Youth. One of the most significant findings of the study is that high quality RHY programs not only meet basic requirements, but "address higher order relational, psychological, and motivational needs... fostering a sense of resilience among RHY" and providing long-term benefits to a youth's functioning.<sup>11</sup> In short, well-funded, high quality RHY programs make a positive impact on a youth's ability to stabilize and successfully transition from crisis to independence. While more research is needed to evaluate the long-term benefits of RHY services, understanding that these programs make a proven difference to the youth they serve gives further support to why we have continued pushing for more shelter beds and services for youth experiencing homelessness.

#### **Funding Recommendations**

Under the previous Administration the City did put forth more resources to increase the number of beds that are available to youth experiencing homelessness, including a system-changing package of bills passed by the City Council over five years ago, but overall, there is still room to go. CHY understands the financial difficulties of this year and we are grateful that funding for RHY programs is largely being kept whole. However, despite baselined funding being maintained, there continues to be vital supports and services that remain underfunded or not funded at all. As such, we present the following recommendations that total an additional \$16,455,000 in funding and other considerations that will significantly improve the financial stability of the RHY programs and the quality of services for youth themselves:

- Fund Support Services for Youth New Arrivals and Unaccompanied Minors: \$1.63M • DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers have been going above and beyond to meet the growing needs of newly arrived youth and unaccompanied minors without any additional support. DYCD's data reflects an almost 40% increase in total utilization, and an almost 16% increase in more intensive case management at the Drop-in Centers from FY22<sup>12</sup> to FY23<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, we are asking for a one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Center contracts. This additional funding will support meeting the basic needs of young people and fund more appropriate staffing across the sites.
- "Right-size" Runaway and Homeless Youth service provider contracts: \$5.5M DYCD-funded RHY provider contracts continue to fall short of covering the true cost of running the programs. We are requesting that all current DYCD-funded Crisis and Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Program contracts be increased to \$55,500. This will cover the baselining of all residential bed rates across contract years, plus a 10% increase for all current DYCD-funded residential RHY contracts.
- Maintain funding for the 16 Housing Specialists in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.5M The funding for the Housing Specialists in the DYCD-funded drop-in centers were cut in the FY25 Preliminary Budget. This funding must be maintained. Since housing navigators were funded in the DYCD system in FY21, available data shows that there has been a 6% increase in vouth exiting homelessness from the DYCD shelters into their own apartments from  $FY21^{14}$  to FY23<sup>15</sup>, and this does not include the hundreds of youth that have exited homelessness into their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Cleland, C.M., Ritchie, A.S., Leonard, N.R., Hughes, C., Powlovich, J., & Schoenberg, J. (2017). Moving from crisis to independence: The characteristic, quality, and impact of specialized settings for runaway and homeless youth. New York: Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing. See page 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY22\_LL86\_RHY\_Demographics-and-Services\_Report-final.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY23\_LL86\_RHY\_Demographics-and-Services\_Report-Final.pdf</u>
<sup>14</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY21\_LL86\_RHY\_Demographics-and-Services\_Report-Final.pdf</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY23 LL86 RHY Demographics-and-Services Report-Final.pdf

own apartments from Drop-in Centers with the support of Housing Specialists using Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV). These are amazing outcomes for RHY, and maintaining these positions will ensure RHY continue to successfully transition to their own apartments and support the Administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis. This ask is echoed by the *Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness* (*OSH*) Steering Committee, in the attached correspondence to the Administration.

• **Restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.6M** In response to the priorities set forth in *Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness,* and based on the success of the CHY Homeless Youth Peer Navigator Pilot (HYPNP), funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers in FY23. These critical positions were held by individuals who had lived experience, and provided peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults. Unfortunately, this funding was cut in FY24. This led to not only people with lived experience losing their jobs, but also has prevented countless other youth from benefiting from peer-on-peer support. This ask is also echoed by the OSH Steering Committee, in the attached correspondence to the Administration.

#### • Fund 100 additional DYCD-RHY beds: \$5.6M

There are simply not enough DYCD-funded RHY shelter beds to meet the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. There are currently only 813 funded RHY beds in NYC, 752 beds for runaway and homeless youth ages 16-20yo, and 60 for homeless young adult ages 21-24 yo. DYCD data shows that from the first six months<sup>16</sup> (January 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup>) of 2023 to the last six months<sup>17</sup> (July 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>) there was an almost 7000% increase in the amount of young people that were "turned away" to the streets due to lack of available youth beds. This is unacceptable. In order to ensure that youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth specific shelter supports, we ask that funding be made available for an additional 100 DYCD-RHY beds, 60 beds for youth ages 16-20yo and 40 beds for young adults ages 21-24yo.

#### • Make youth categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers

Youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs continue to not be eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to first enter a Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter, despite being legally eligible since the CityFHEPS laws passed by City Council went into effect on January 8, 2024. The Administration must implement these laws, not only because they are legally required to, but because youth in DYCD programs are homeless. Period.

#### COLA for Human Services Workers, echoing the <u>#JustPay Campaign</u>

We thank the Administration and the City Council for including a 9.27% wage increase for Citycontracted human services workers as this \$741 million investment is a significant step in fairly compensating frontline workers. By committing to meaningful, yearly increases in salaries to help workers keep up with cost-of-living, the City has supported the sector in undoing decades of underfunding for human services. More must be done to achieve true livable wages and fair funding on government contracts, but this is a remarkable investment and acknowledgement of how important these workers are to New York. We look forward to working with the City for a seamless COLA implementation so that organizations receive their funding on time to distribute to the 80,000 City-contracted human services workers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local Law 79 Runaway-and-Homeless Youth Shelter Access-January-to-June-2023.pdf</u>
<sup>17</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local Law 79 Runaway-and-Homeless Youth Shelter Access july to December-</u>
2023 Final.pdf

#### For questions please contact: Jamie Powlovich Coalition for Homeless Youth, jamie@nychy.org, (347)772-2352

#### The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Founded in 1978 as the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) is a consortium of 65 agencies whose mission is, as a membership organization, to use its collective voice to promote the safety, health, and future of runaway, homeless and street involved youth through advocacy, authentic collaboration with youth and young adults (YYA) with lived expertise and training and technical assistance.

CHY is primarily an advocacy organization, leveraging the expertise and experience of its membership as well as YYA with the lived experience of homelessness to shape the landscape for runaway and homeless youth across New York State. This is achieved by increasing public awareness, coalition building, policy work and public advocacy campaigns for pertinent legislation and funding. Notably, in 2015, CHY was instrumental in the advocacy efforts that resulted in the doubling of the State budget for runaway and homeless youth services. CHY's advocacy also contributed to the development of NYS statutory and regulatory changes that became effective in 2018, permitting localities across the State to extend length of stay and increase age of youth served by RHY programs in their communities. Most recently, we passed state legislation this session that will grant decisionally capable runaway and homeless minors the ability to consent to their own health care, including gender-affirming care.

Lastly, and most importantly, as a coalition and voice for a community that is often overlooked, underrepresented and under-resourced, CHY prides itself on ensuring that the majority of our staff have the lived experience of youth homelessness. Our commitment to giving power to those with lived experience is also prioritized through our support of the New York City Youth Action Board (YAB), as well as our annual Youth Advocacy Fellowship Program, Project UNITE and our now concluded Opening Doors Pilot Program with the NYC Department of Education (DOE). These initiatives not only expand the way that CHY is authentically collaborating with young people who have the lived experience of homelessness, but it also awards us the ability to work together with directly impacted youth, to give them the tools and supports needed so that they can effectively create change. Combining the leadership of YYA with the long-established advocacy efforts of CHY has fundamentally changed the socio-political landscape for runaway and homeless youth.

#### NYC FY25 OSH Budget Letter

March 20th, 2024

#### MAYOR ADAMS

The Opportunity Starts with a Home (OSH) Steering Committee is writing to urge you to include \$5 million in funding to support the Financial Literacy Programming, Housing and Peer Navigator positions, and youth and young adult mobile platform in the New York City FY25 Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) budget. These were all priority interventions, initially funded in FY23, attached to the NYC Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP).

In September 2021, New York City was awarded a 15 million dollar <u>Youth Homelessness Demonstration</u> <u>Program</u> (YHDP) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to create a plan and fund initiatives to address youth homelessness. In August 2022, after an eight-month planning process, "<u>Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness</u>," (OSH) was released.

The OSH plan was the result of an intensive multi-sector community planning process that brought together fifteen city agencies, youth with lived experience, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and philanthropic and research partners and culminated in a plan for how to invest the grant, implement policy changes, and spearhead new city initiatives towards preventing and ending youth homelessness.

The leadership of youth with lived experience through New York City's Youth Action Board (YAB), was instrumental in ensuring that the plan was written in collaboration with young people who have lived experience with homelessness. Throughout the process, the YAB members served as key collaborators in developing a plan that is intersectional in its approach to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and led to the prioritization of many projects that were funded by the city, HUD, and philanthropy. Initiatives included:

#### <u>City Funded</u>

- The city's first-ever financial counseling program tailored to youth experiencing homelessness.
- 16 full-time Peer Navigators positions, for individuals who have the lived experience of homelessness, that provided peer-to-peer support, at each of the eight DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) drop-in centers; and offered aftercare services to Youth and Young Adults (YYA) placed in permanent housing.
- Sustain Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program Housing Navigators at each of the eight RHY drop-in centers.
- HUD Funded
  - The city's first-ever Host Home and Shelter Diversion Program, primarily serving the LGBTQ+ ballroom community of New York City
  - 102 new units of rapid re-housing (RRH) for YYA
  - New street outreach programming developed specifically for youth.
  - Creation of jobs specifically for individuals who have lived experience across all HUDfunded projects.

- Philanthropy Funded
  - Funding for additional research and assessment
  - Creation of the first Housing and Peer Navigator Training Institute
  - Development of YourPeer, a mobile platform to connect youth to services.

Although there has been much success in implementing many of the funded initiatives, funding has been cut for a number of the city-funded initiatives and funding needs to be restored to ensure that the goals outlined in the OSH plan can be met. More specifically, the Opportunity Starts with a Home Steering Committee is asking that funding be included in the adopted New York City Fiscal Year 2025 budget to:

- Maintain funding for the 16 Housing Specialists in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.5M The current Housing Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers are temporarily funded through the end of the fiscal year (June 2024). Data already demonstrates their success through the record number of youth that have exited homelessness into their apartments, since their inception. Since 2021, almost 600 YYA have moved into permanent housing with the support of the Housing Specialists who utilize their rapport with real estate brokers and landlords to assist YYA. Defunding these positions eliminated the only housing-specific jobs at DYCD programs. Maintaining these positions will ensure RHY successfully transition to their apartments and support the administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis.
- Restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.6M In response to the priorities set forth in *Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*, funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers. During FY23, 425 youth were supported by peer navigators in their housing search, post-move-in support, connection to mental health services, employment, education, and daily living skills. Unfortunately, these critical positions that provide peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults, were cut in FY24 and should be restored. This funding ensures that these functions continue and that peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults can be provided.
- Restore funding for the Financial Literacy program in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.4M During the planning process of the Opportunity Starts with a Home plan, YYA advocated for the need for financial literacy education. Many RHY do not have bank accounts and have low/poor credit scores, making it difficult to secure safe, stable housing and achieve independence. As a result, DYCD, in partnership with the Department of Consumer Welfare and Protection's Office of Financial Empowerment, was funded to implement a Financial Empowerment program at the DYCD RHY Drop-In Centers. Each Drop-In Center has one full-time coach who hosts workshops and provides individualized one-on-one services. During Fiscal 2024, as of January, the financial coaches have offered 126 workshops with 694 participants. They also offered 320 one-on-one counseling sessions to 119 youth. DYCD has had to self-fund this program for FY24. This funding should be restored as it paves a pathway for RHY to become housed and, more importantly, remain housed.
- Restore funding for the NYC Public School's commitment to fund a YYA mobile platform for services: \$500k (\$250k/year)
   In the Opportunities Starts with a Home plan, funding was allocated by Philanthropy and the NYC

In the Opportunities Starts with a Home plan, funding was allocated by Philanthropy and the NYC Department of Education (DOE), also known as NYC Public Schools (NYCPS), to create a mobile

platform for YYA that connects them to social services such as shelter, food, clothing, personal care, health, and more. The YYA mobile platform lost half of its funding when NYCPS was unable to follow through with its funding commitment of \$500k over two years. In its pilot stage, the mobile tool has connected 1,497 users to information on food, 1,067 to clothing, 1,052 to shelter, and hundreds more to information on personal care and health services. Restoring this funding would allow the mobile platform to increase the accuracy of information and accessibility features among other key needs dictated by persons with lived experience.

It is imperative for us to prioritize the restoration of funding for these positions and programs within the runaway and homeless youth space. By investing in these positions and programs, we are investing in the futures of young people in need. The inability to restore funding for these positions exacerbates the hardships faced by runaway and homeless youth and undermines the progress made through the efforts and partnership of the NYC CoC's Opportunity Starts with a Home Steering Committee. Every young person deserves access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

The Opportunity Starts with a Home Steering Committee



Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Written Testimony Presented by: Dr. Sophine Charles, Associate Executive Director, Downstate

> New York City Council Children and Youth Budget Hearing Friday, March, 22, 2024

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I am Dr. Sophine Charles, Associate Executive Director, Downstate at the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA). We represent more than 100 nonprofit child welfare agencies across New York State, including more than fifty contracted providers who deliver child welfare services in New York City. Our members provide foster care, adoption, family preservation, juvenile justice, and special education services. On behalf of our member agencies, the thousands of employees, and tens of thousands of children and families served by our agencies, thank you for the opportunity to testify and submit written testimony to the Council's Children and Youth Committee's Budget Hearing.

We applaud the Council for its recognition and support of the more than 80,000 Human Services workers for their hard work and dedication in delivering 24/7 services to New York City families. We thank Mayor Adams and the Council for your commitment to providing pay enhancements to human services workers via annual 3% COLAs over the next 3 years and \$170 million in Workforce Enhancements. We cannot overemphasize the impact that these fiscal supports will have on the quality of life for thousands of workers who care for New Yorkers.

Today, we lift up four priorities as identified by NYC agencies with contracts with the Administration for Children's Services as well as many other City agencies: 1) Unfunded services delivered to migrant families, 2) Ongoing contract challenges, 3) Funding and support for community-based programs for Justice involved youth, and 4) Pay Parity and career enhancements. With support from the Council, we our priorities could open up pathways to improve the scope, availability, and quality of services to NYC children and families and meet the extensive needs of a growing migrant population.

#### **Unfunded Services Delivered to Migrant Families**

# ASK: The Council needs to ensure that contracted agencies are funded and reimbursed for the hundreds of thousands of dollars of unfunded services and supports provided to migrant families.

In 2022, a significant number of NYC child welfare agencies were asked to voluntarily provide services to migrant and asylum seeker families at shelters and in various other facilities across the five boroughs. In many instances, agencies are using private dollars to fund and deliver services to this population. In November 2023, COFCCA asked our member agencies to provide data on the number of migrant and

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asylum seeker families that were served during the period of 2022–2023. The data revealed that 21 agencies served more than 7,000 migrant families.

The agencies provided basic and essential needs – food, clothing, laundry supplies, shoes, coats, toiletries, diapers, feminine hygiene products, bedding, school enrollment assistance, school supplies, Metro cards, NYCID support, tutoring, afterschool clubs, ESL classes, legal supports, clinical/medical supports and numerous neighborhood/community resources. This list accounts for only a small fraction of the growing unfunded demands placed upon providers. At this time, we are collecting data from the agencies to provide a specific dollar amount for the cost of services to new families. We have an active survey out to the providers asking them to quantify the cost of services for unfunded assistance and supports deliver to migrant families.

The child welfare workforce are the essential workers who showed up every day to provide services to thousands of families during the pandemic. Today, they remain on the frontlines as first responders to support the newly arrived children and families. Agencies must receive adequate reimbursement for services already provided to the new arrivals and obtain adequate compensation going forward for their work. A recent article describes the needs of a migrant family seeking services and the services provided by a nonprofit agency:

https://www.nynmedia.com/news/2024/03/migrant-mothers-and-their-kids-facing-challenges-alone-look-nonprofits-help/394843/

#### Contract Challenges (Timely Payments, Contract Flexibility, & Adjustments for Inflation)

## ASK: The City needs to scan the payment records of all City agencies to identify late payers and create a system for timely payments across all City contracts.

We understand that the Mayor's Office of Contracts has been working diligently to clear a \$6 milliondollar backlog of unpaid contracts. We applaud this long-awaited fiscal cleanup. Unfortunately, too many agencies are still subjected to late payments, some have millions of dollars of outstanding payments. Late payments negatively impact the agencies' cash flow and influence the need for bridge loans. Our member agencies continue to identify DYCD and DOE as the most chronically delinquent with

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payments to the agencies. Agencies consistently report ACS as one City agency with a timely payment record. Improvements in the timely payment process remains as a major challenge for the agencies.

## ASK: The City needs to review contract payment structures to infuse flexibility in the budget modification process to allow contracted agencies to address emerging crises.

Agencies are frequently called to response to human service crises, particularly, during circumstances that require a prevention response to avert an avalanche of future problems (hunger, homelessness, and foster placement) for children, families, and the City. During the pandemic, we have learned a lot about the guardrails placed on contracts and how contract funding was not designed to support essential services (remote workforce, education, and other mechanism to work with families who were the least equipped to access city services (DOE, HRA, HPD, and community-based services) from a virtual platform.

Today, our programs have become a lifeline to migrant children and families as the engage in many efforts to address a growing humanitarian crisis in the City. Agencies are providing a wide range of services that include: food, clothing, shelter, child care, health care, mental health services, family counseling, legal services, housing, access to public benefits, and immigration and educational support. However, contract structures do not support budget modifications that would allow agencies to get paid for this work. Contract payment structures must include some degree of flexibility to allow agencies to address emerging crises required by the city.

## ASK: The City must build in funding adjustments for the cost of inflation across the life of contracts.

Most City contracts are awarded for a number of years and contracts do not include any adjustments for the cost of inflation. The rate for a 10-year contract does not increase to support rising cost. For example, an agency receiving a 10-year ACS Prevention contract with a fixed budget has no wiggle room to increase salaries, pay for high real estate cost and other rising overhead expenses. The cost of doing business increases over the life of a contract and providers are saddled with budgets that do not increase with the cost of inflation. Funding adjustments for inflation in City contracts would alleviate the growing demands on agencies to raise private dollars to subsidize contracts. The Council's support is needed to secure additional investments for the cost of inflations across multi-year contacts.

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#### ASK: Increase funding and community-based supports for justice involved youth

The City has invested in Fair Futures funding to support many **youthyouths** in foster care and this is a big win for youth. Unfortunately, justice involved youth do not meet the requirements for most Fair Future programs. Many of our member agencies working to address the needs of justice involved youth struggle to secure adequate community-based support services. Youth enrolled in secure and nonsecure detention programs could significantly benefit from community-based aftercare services. However, the city's lack of investment in an aftercare infrastructure for youth means that they cannot access tutoring, vocational skills programs, mentoring supports, transitional housing, and other services that could help reduce recidivism. Agencies are increasingly challenged by the rise in the number of youthyouths referred to secure and nonsecure detention programs. With an increase in the youth census for these programs comes an uptick in contraband (weapons and controlled substances), violence against staff and other youth. Agencies are profoundly stretched in their efforts to meet the needs of justice involved youth. Without an increase in community-based aftercare services, the lack of tangible interventions and youth development opportunities, young people will continue to experience dismal outcomes. We need the Council's support to increase funding for community-based aftercare services services for justice involved youth.

## ASK: Fund and Support pay parity and the need for career enhancements for the child welfare workforce

We fully recognize and appreciate the Mayor and Council's support for the 3% COLAs over the next three years, this is truly a welcomed and needed fiscal incentive for the workforce. Even with an infusion of COLAs, the child welfare workforce remains disadvantaged and need pay parity comparable to City staff in the same roles and access to career enhancement opportunities. Our agencies are still struggling to maintain a well-trained and credentialed staff. In 2022, the NYC Prevention caseworker turnover rate was 43% according to a COFCCA survey of providers and the vacancy rate was 18%. The average starting salary for an NYC Prevention caseworker (Bachelor's Degree) is \$48,063 compared to \$55,463 in the public sector. Our workforce requires a commitment to pay parity with public sector wages. Moreover, our child welfare staff tell us that in addition to salary increases, they need more support in achieving their higher educational goals in the form of scholarship incentives. The low

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salaries also make it impossible for licensed mental health staff to pay off student loans, many as high as \$1000 per month. We want to continue to elevate the need for additional workforce supports. The Council's support of scholarship incentives and loan forgiveness programs is another critical step for our agencies' ability to hire and retain a highly qualified workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony to elevate the ongoing and emerging issues that impact the agencies, workforce, and newly arrived families. We welcome the opportunity to engage the Council in a conversation to discuss this important issue and to be helpful to you as budget decisions are made. We are available to answer any questions or for any assistance that you might need.

Sophine Charles, PhD Associate Executive Director, Downstate Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies scharles@cofcca.org (212) 929-2626, ext. 212 254 West 31 Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor New York, NY 10001



#### Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti, Policy and Advocacy Associate Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

#### Submitted to the New York City Council FY'2025 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing Children and Youth Services Committee March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Stevens and all the members of the City Council Children and Youth Committee for holding today's important hearing on the Mayor's FY25 Preliminary Budget. Below we include recommendations for how our City can improve access to youth programming that is so essential to ensuring youth can access development and professional opportunities, economic supports, and community networks.

#### Invest in Youth Services and the Youth Service Workforce

The scope of afterschool and youth services cuts facing New York City is staggering, and it is urgent that our city leaders protect these supports that are critical to the immediate and long-term wellbeing of New York city's children and families. The November Budget Modification and Preliminary Budget include a baselined \$6.9 million cut to COMPASS Afterschool, as well as a \$19.6 million cut to Summer Rising. These cuts are devastating and will dramatically disrupt the lives of families across the city.

Access to free and affordable afterschool services has never been more important for New York families. Citywide, 80% of families cannot afford after school for their children, and across the city families pay up to 63% of their annual income on <sup>1000</sup>. The \$6.9 million cut to COMPASS afterschool will result in a loss of over 3,500 seats for youth, preventing them from accessing community and positive youth development experiences. The \$19.6 million cut to Summer Rising will reduce the program to only 4 days a week and eliminate field trips. **Our youth deserve better – we urge you to restore \$6.9 million to COMPASS Afterschool and \$19.6 million to Summer Rising.** 

Our City must also address the operational issues plaguing the youth services system. Therefore, in addition to restoring funding, we join our partners in the Campaign for Children (C4C) in urging the city to implement the following recommendations to address operational challenges:

- Increase the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of no less than \$22/hour for staff and ensure year-round contracting.
- Prioritize consumer-centered outreach and enrollment, including by enabling CBOs providing youth services to directly enroll children and youth onsite, and by taking immediate action to stand up community-rooted application and enrollment facilitators that prioritize expediting access to youth services (afterschool and summer programming) in partnership with CBOs
- Establish year-round, 12-month youth services and shift to a K-8 summer program model
- Pay youth service providers on time and catch up on payments owed



- Fully staff DYCD divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and make permanent the ability of youth service providers to batch multiple months of invoices.
- Release a new RFP for the SONYC and COMPASS contracts that covers the full and actual cost of care.

By restoring the cuts and addressing the current operational shortcomings, we can build a stronger youth services system and ensure all young people who need services are able to receive them.

#### Support Immigrant Families in Need of Child Care

Promise NYC was initiated in December of 2022 to provide childcare assistance to low-income families with children whose immigration status makes them ineligible for other, federally-funded subsidized childcare. The City Council was instrumental in making this program happen. Last year, the City Council ensured that Promise NYC funding was restored, and we must ensure that this vital program is not eliminated. All parents want a safe, high-quality, and culturally responsive place for their children to learn, and Promise NYC provides this option for undocumented families. We strongly urge city leaders to restore and baseline \$20 million for Promise NYC to ensure that immigrant families can access child care.

#### **Invest in Youth Employment**

Youth services provide essential opportunities, employment, and connections for young people in New York City. Youth programming helps to maintain relationships among peers and helps to keep families connected to support systems, and also provides financial opportunities and independence. CCC's Keeping Track of New York City's Children found that 62% of youth aged 18 to 24 reported a loss of employment income since March 2020, and nearly a quarter of youth aged 16-24 are out of school and out of work in New York City.<sup>ii</sup> This data shows too many young people facing barriers to accessing education, employment, and other community supports.

Youth across the City have made clear that investing in youth services is the best pathway to achieving community wellbeing. A key way to do this is to ensure the successful Learning to Work program remains funded. This program provides support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a postsecondary plan. **City Leaders must preserve a \$33 million cut to the Learning to Work program that will occur due to the impending expiration of COVID-19 stimulus funding.** Losing this funding would be devastating for youth who rely on the support of this program.

#### **Invest in Runaway and Homeless Youth**

Numerous challenges currently face Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in New York. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is mainly responsible for supporting this population; however, it is not uncommon for RHY to also be involved with ACS, DHS, and HRA in the efforts to find housing or social services. We must ensure that Runaway and Homeless Youth have access to more beds and more support. Since youth do not have a right to shelter and DYCD does not have enough beds for young people (especially older youth), many young people are driven onto the streets or into dangerous living situations. We therefore urge the City to invest \$5.6 million to create 100 additional beds: 60 beds for 16 to20-year-olds, and 40 beds for 21 to24-year-olds. This investment will provide safe, temporary housing for youth who otherwise would be without a stable option.



Furthermore, we also urge the city to **invest \$1.62 million to maintain funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System.** The housing and youth services systems are complex and convoluted, and it is critical to have a trusted support person to offer advice, resources, and answers for young people.

#### Promote Community Safety and Wellbeing by Investing in Community Services and Resources

To promote community safety and wellbeing, we must invest in community services and resources. Unfortunately, the FY24 November Plan and the FY25 Preliminary Budget include cuts to probation programs that have proven to be successful in supporting re-entry and connecting young people to mentorship and services. Failing to provide robust reentry services or supportive probation programs will harm our youth and is counterintuitive to building safe communities.

We need creative, non-carceral solutions to violence, and we urge the Mayor and the City Council to utilize the city budget to invest heavily in community programming, parks, housing, youth sports, employment, and behavioral health. **CCC therefore recommends the following:** 

- **Treat** gun violence as a public health crisis by investing in transformative community programs, including expanding investment in Cure Violence, credible messenger programs, youth engagement programs and other community-rooted programs that employ a public health approach to community safety
- Restore the \$17 million cut from nonprofit programs provided in NYC jails
- **Restore** the \$1.6 million cut to the Arches program, a transformative mentorship program to support 16–24-year-olds, from both the November plan and Preliminary budget
- **Restore** \$2.6 million cut from the Next Steps program from the November plan
- Close Rikers and ensure the City remains on track with the closure plan
- **Redirect** the funding from school policing into opportunities for young people in schools and communities
- **Restore** the \$22 million cut for New York Public Libraries

We also demand an end to the Quality-of-Life Violations policing initiative that began around March 2022 from the Mayor's office and NYPD. To be clear, this is a new iteration of <u>broken windows policing</u>, a policy that we know does not work and further criminalizes Black and Brown New Yorkers. We are already seeing the impact of this policy with increasing arrests and detainment, specifically and disproportionately targeting Black New Yorkers. This policy should be immediately halted. This is a pivotal moment to shift how we approach community safety, and we must commit to resourcing systemically neglected communities and building support networks.

Youth services and programs must be fully funded because young people deserve to live in a city where there are opportunities and resources for their growth, development, and joy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2023). CCC Brief: From Birth to Age 12. The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City. Accessed: https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/from-birth-to-age-12-child-care-and-out-of-school-care/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>ii</sup> Keeping Track Online: Youth. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. 2020.

https://cccnewyork.org/datapublications/keeping-track-of-nyc-children-2022/?section=Youth



#### Testimony of Day Care Council of New York Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair At the FY 2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing

#### Prepared by Gregory Brender, Chief Policy and Innovation Officer and Shelby Lohr, Policy Analyst

#### March 22nd, 2024

Thank you Chair Stevens and the members of the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to testify.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY sees a future where all children have access to quality early childhood education and where early childhood providers and their workforce have the tools and resources necessary to offer the highest quality early childhood education.

DCCNY supports its member organizations and New York City's early childhood field a through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, professional development and training for early childhood educators, directors and staff and referral services for parents looking to find child care. DCCNY member organizations provide early care and education at over 200 sites in neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations operate with contracts with the New York City Department of Education (DOE), while a smaller portion work with federally funded Head Start contracts or through private funding. DCCNY member organizations seek to provide quality early care and education services to New York's children and families across all five boroughs. DCCNY member organizations employ over 4,000 New Yorkers– the majority of whom are Black and Brown women.

Day Care Council of New York is an active member of Campaign for and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care.

The early childhood education system engages multiple city agencies. We start our testimony with Promise NYC which is managed by ACS and overseen by this committee. We also include urgent recommendations around early childhood education programs working under contract with NYCPS.

#### **Promise NYC**

Promise NYC was one among the most important new investments that the City made in its FY 2023 Budget. Promise NYC expands access to Child Care Assistance to families who continue to be denied access due to discriminatory requirements.

Promise NYC funded child care for families who otherwise would have been denied and partnered with community based organizations to ensure that families could access the funding. It is not just an important investment but also a statement if the City's values showing a commitment to ending discrimination and expanding access to education.

As Mayor Adams said,

Navigating obstacles in a new city and a new country are tough, and coupling those issues with a lack of childcare can prevent parents and families from achieving the dream they so desperately set out to achieve. By launching Promise NYC, we are alleviating the stress from those concerns, supporting children and families, and creating a fairer city for all New Yorkers."<sup>1</sup>

DCCNY was disappointed that this important program was eliminated the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. We urge Promise NYC to be restored and baselined at \$20 million.

#### Early Childhood Education and the FY 2025 Budget

The FY 2025 Budget is a perilous moment for New York City's early childhood system. It includes the most drastic cuts to early childhood education in the City's history and it fails to take action on the workforce crisis impacting early childhood education. Without major changes, this budget will leave many New York City families with access to child care and contribute to an exodus of working families out of New York City.

#### **Cuts to Early Childhood Education**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/909-22/mayor-adams-rolls-out-promise-nyc-provide-childcare-assistance-low-income-families-with

In their February 2024 report, <u>Drifting from The Plan: Changes to Early Childhood</u> <u>Budgets</u>, <sup>2</sup>the New York City Independent Budget office uncovered that the Adams Administration has proposed cutting at least \$399 million from 3-K and Pre-K.

These cuts include:

- \$170 Million in FY 2025 from PEG (Programs to Eliminate the Gap) in the Mayor's November Plan and Preliminary Budget Proposal;
- \$93 million in federal Education Funding that the City has dedicated in past years to e-K and Pre-K;
- \$96 million in Federal Funding used to support mandated preschool special education classes for children with special needs
- The FY 2024 cancellation of the planned expansion of 3-K for All Programs in school districts without guaranteed access.

The administration has cited underenrollment in 3-K programs as a justification for these cuts. While we acknowledge underenrollment in many programs, systemic reforms that both DCCNY and many members of the City Council have long supported are a more appropriate solution.

The system faces enrollment challenges, because of a lack of outreach and awareness, the significant administrative barriers to enrollment and the large number of child care to enrollment will continue to exist without adequate funding to increase the capacity and reach of our childcare providers.

The City must act NOW and reform its current 3-K system so that all children in New York City have the opportunity to access early childcare, not only a select few. We at the DCCNY recommend that New York City immediately enact the following recommendations:

• Commit to fund current 3-K program levels and restoring the timeline for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office. *Drifting from the Plan: Changes to Early Childhood Budgets*. February 2024, https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/drifting-from-the-plan-changes-to-early-childhood-budgets-february-2024.pdf

the 3-K expansion.

- Implement the conversion of 3-K school day / school year seats, to extended day, year round seats which the City Council funded in its FY 2024 budget;
- Invest a robust level of resources in linguistically and culturally appropriate on the ground and multimedia marketing, community engagement and enrollment efforts for 3-K.
- Reform enrollment procedures so that community based organizations have the option of directly enrolling children whose families apply for 3-K, Pre-K or child care.

#### PAY PARITY

As the representative of New York City's early care and education provider organizations, DCCNY works with the City and our partners in organized labor to come to a labor agreement that reflects the skills and hard work of the teachers, staff and directors who work every day to make high-quality education available to the youngest New Yorkers.

The early childhood workforce is drastically underpaid and the gap between their salaries and those of their counterparts in public schools is stark. In our report with the City Council Black, Latino and Asian Caucus, we found that directors at CBOs lose more than \$2.2 million over the course of a 25-year career by remaining at a CBO. Further, certified teachers lose out on \$1.7 million over a 25-year career, and assistant teachers sacrifice over \$235,000 across a 25-year career.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, many of the teachers, staff and directors in community based organizations work for longer hours and a greater number of days than their counterparts in public schools.

In the FY 2025, Budget, the City must act to ensure that these essential but underappreciated workers receive salary and benefits on par with their counterparts in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> New York City Council Black, Latino and Asian Caucus and the Day Care Council of New York. *The Enduring Value of the Early Childhood Workforce: Why New York City Must Complete the PAth to PArity for the Community-Based Child Care Workforce"* September 2023 https://www.dccnyinc.org/our-work/public-policy/publications/

public schools.

DCCNY urges the City to fund a new labor contract that advances childhood education parity between center and school based services by including

1. Baseline salary increases for the workforce wiith a \$25/hour base hourly wage for support staff

- 2. Restoration of longevity differentials
- 3. Per diems for Extended Day/Extended Year Programs

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions and can be reached at <u>gbrender@dccnyinc.org</u>.



#### Testimony Submitted by Allison Marino, MSW Director of Public Affairs Edible Schoolyard NYC

#### For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Children & Youth March 22nd, 2024

Thank you to Council Member Stevens for holding this hearing, and to the Committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Edible Schoolyard NYC (ESYNYC) is on a mission to make edible education accessible for every child in New York City. We believe edible education—where kids experience hands-on cooking and gardening—helps kids gain the skills to contribute to a healthy and sustainable food system for us all. By building fundamental social, emotional, academic, and physical skills, kids learn how they can lead the way to community wellbeing and equity. We envision a future where access to hands-on cooking and gardening experiences for every child promotes a NYC of healthy, sustainable communities. Together with public school communities across the city, we're building spaces for kids to flourish. Last school year, we reached nearly 4,000 students and taught nearly 2,200 hands-on cooking and gardening lessons across 16 public schools in Upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and The Bronx.

As members of our city's educational community, we take our responsibility to provide New York City's young people with access to everything they need to learn, thrive, and build foundations for future success seriously. As members of our city's urban agriculture community, our work gives us firsthand experience of the impact that access to hands-on gardening opportunities can have on young people. We can see that hands-on food and garden education has an indelible positive impact on students and their communities—Edible Schoolyard NYC's 2022-23 program data showed that nearly 90% of teachers and school staff surveyed agreed that students felt more positively about school because of our classes. 96% agreed that our programming positively contributed to students' emotional wellbeing, and 90% said it helped them learn about each other's cultures.

Unfortunately, Edible Schoolyard NYC, the school communities we serve, and urban agriculture organizations like us are unable to extend these amazing benefits to 18-24 year olds taking part in City workforce development programs such as the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Work Learn Grow (WLG). These programs run at times that are not fully compatible with the regional growing season, and their recruitment, placement, and compensation models do not promote interest and continuity for young people nor capacity for host urban agriculture



organizations. In their current forms, these programs make it difficult for young people to identify interest in urban agriculture programs or organizations, and make hosting interns difficult for potential urban agriculture employers. This means that young people are going without the vital hands-on gardening and urban greening experience that urban agriculture can provide them—both for their social-emotional growth, and for their career trajectories.

We know that jobs connecting the environment and health are growing rapidly, and represent some of the most important opportunities for which to prepare our young people. In 2022, The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup> reported that green jobs will continue to be added to the workforce throughout the next decade, and that many of these jobs will pay higher than the national median salary. Environmental engineers, earning an average of \$96,820 annually in 2021 will continue to see additional jobs added to their field through 2030, as will environmental scientists including health specialists, conservation scientists, environmental engineering and environmental health protection technicians, which both only require associate's degrees to enter the field. At these rates of growth, pay, and educational accessibility, we cannot afford to hold our young people back from opportunities to experience urban agriculture and connect to green jobs as early as possible.

The FY25 City budget represents a unique opportunity for the government, youth, and community development organizations to work together to amplify the impact of urban agriculture as a connector to social-emotional wellbeing and lucrative career opportunities. Further, connecting our young people to green jobs experience through equitable SYEP and WLG models invests in progress toward our city's social, racial, economic, and climate justice goals. This approach addresses the immediate financial and experiential needs of New Yorkers while fostering long-term resilience of the city's local environment and equity of the city's food systems.

Edible Schoolyard NYC urges City Council to:

- 1. **Maintain the investment of \$206.5 million in baseline funding** for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and \$20 million for the school-year Work Learn Grow (WLG) program.
- 2. Address current barriers in DYCD regulations hindering urban agriculture worksites from providing meaningful youth experiences. We propose the following solution:
  - a. The city should establish a youth-focused workforce development pilot program through DYCD that meets the needs of local urban agriculture organizations. This program would focus on youth leadership and development in urban agriculture, and should be created

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "Green growth: Employment projections in environmentally focused occupations," Career Outlook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2022.



and implemented with deep partnership of the city's community-based urban agriculture organizations.

We appreciate the City's commitments to building spaces for all of our city's young people to thrive, and this Committee's consideration of our recommendations on youth workforce development. Edible Schoolyard NYC appreciates your dedication to these issues and your consideration of our recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison Marino, MSW Director of Public Affairs Edible Schoolyard NYC

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#### Testimony Submitted by Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, Policy Manager, Equity Advocates For the Committee on Children and Youth Hearing on the FY25 NYC Budget

March 22, 2024

My name is **Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo, Policy Manager, Equity Advocates.** Thank you to Council Member Stevens for holding today's budget hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Equity Advocates builds the capacity of nonprofit organizations to address the underlying causes of food inequity through policy and systems change. We partner with New York-based organizations working to alleviate hunger and poverty, providing them with the tools they need to be more civically engaged—including policy education, advocacy training and coalition leadership, such as convening the NY Food Policy Alliance since March 2020.

<u>NYC Food Policy Alliance</u> is a multi-sector group of 75+ food system stakeholders from across New York, including frontline CBOs directly impacted by food insecurity. The Alliance's mission is to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to our current economic and hunger crises, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system. Collectively, we approach this work through an anti-racism lens to ensure communities of color and other systemically under-resourced communities benefit from public policies and funding.

It is crucial to acknowledge the challenging fiscal landscape shaped by Mayor Eric Adams' proposed 15% budget cuts across New York City's agencies and those proposed in the FY25 Preliminary Budget. The proposed \$60 million cut to the Department of Education's Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS) threatens the progress made over the years to ensure healthier, more nutritious school meals. The \$3 million budget reduction for the NYC Compost initiative has led to over 100 layoffs, effectively dismantling the city's local composting programs for residents<sup>1</sup>. Rather than cutting critical community programs, the City should invest in and enhance essential services that are integral to the health and welfare of the city and its residents-including the thousands of new arrivals who are in need of services and support.

Our platform, advocating for enhanced economic development and support for marginalized communities, becomes more crucial in this context. As we navigate these challenging times, our commitment to advocating for equitable policies and funding in the food system is unwavering, ensuring that the most vulnerable New Yorkers are not disproportionately impacted by these fiscal adjustments.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>Composting's 'True Believers' Jilted as N.Y.C. Curbside Program Grows</u>

Amidst these challenging budgetary constraints, our platform is more committed than ever to fostering equitable economic development and ensuring that vulnerable communities, already disproportionately affected by economic disparities, do not face further marginalization. We seek a FY25 City Budget that will ensure all New York City families have access to healthy, affordable food, strengthen urban agriculture and support the next generation of farmers, and foster long-term resilience and economic opportunity in the City's food system.

We respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following budget recommendations in the FY25 New York City Budget:

#### Strengthen Urban Agriculture & Support the Next Generation of Farmers

- **Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb** to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators , seasonal staff members and to increase the distribution of resources, including the delivery of compost, topsoil, and lumber, for community gardeners. Community gardens serve as vital green spaces that promote growth, unity, and environmental awareness. They also address critical challenges such as food security, environmental sustainability, and community well-being.
- Allocate funding for the new Office of Urban Agriculture housed within the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability (OLTPS) to maintain appropriate levels of staffing and increase transparency about Office goals and activities among the community of urban agriculture practitioners. Use funding to create a position dedicated to ongoing, intentional community engagement to inform the urban agriculture advisory's development of a set of recommendations as outlined in Local Law 123.
- Maintain the investment of \$206.5 million in baseline funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and \$20 million for the school-year Work Learn Grow (WLG) program. Address current barriers in DYCD regulations hindering urban agriculture worksites from providing meaningful youth experiences. The city should establish a youth focus pilot program that meets the needs of local urban agriculture organizations. This program will focus on youth leadership and development in urban agriculture.
- Restore \$7 million in NYC Community Composting program funding, with a focus on engaging Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the brown bin rollout initiative. This initiative creates local jobs, reduces landfill waste, and fosters community engagement and helps move the City towards its Zero Waste goals.
- Maintain \$10.3 million in baseline funding to support youth in urban agriculture careers, including expanding the DOE's Career and Technical Education Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources program. Allocate substantial funding from the CTE program to support the growth of

urban agriculture initiatives and create a seamless pathway from the DOE's expansion of Food and Nutrition Education for PreK-8th Grade to Career and Technical Education programs.

#### Foster Long-Term Resilience And Economic Opportunity In The City's Food System

- Increase Funding to \$4.9 million for Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, up from \$3.7 million in FY24. We support the <u>NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives</u>' call for increased investment in the initiative that supports 15 worker cooperative support organizations, offering education, training, and assistance for new and existing cooperative small businesses. We urge that this increase in allocation help put worker cooperative support organizations that prioritize food businesses—such as RiseBoro Community Partnerships' <u>Worker Coop</u> <u>Development Program</u>—on the path to partnership within WCBDI. By prioritizing BIPOC and new groups focused on food systems businesses, which may not have had historic advantages and access to capital, we are promoting greater equity in our local food system and supporting the City's goals and values under the <u>Good Food Purchasing Program</u>. Worker cooperatives stimulate a value-based workforce, fostering collaboration, shared prosperity, and a more inclusive economy. With this funding, we aim for specific outcomes, such as empowering marginalized communities, enhancing economic sustainability, and strengthening the local food ecosystem.
- Fully Fund the Citywide Community Land Trust Initiative at \$3 million. We prioritize the notion that moving public land with insecure tenure to trust land will strengthen land security and sovereignty and prioritize access to lands for people who have deep and historic community connections, especially BIPOC farmers, growers and community gardens. Launched in FY2020, the citywide CLT discretionary funding initiative has helped catalyze CLT organizing, education, training and technical assistance. We support the NYC Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI) in its call for full funding to support 20 organizations working to develop and preserve deeply-affordable housing, community and commercial spaces, and advance a just recovery in Black and brown NYC communities. Public land must be used for public good, and be reserved for CLTs that provide for meaningful community control. It is also critical to raise awareness that CLTs can be utilized for commercial urban agriculture. We believe that this embodies the ability to balance local land control and long-term, stewarded development that addresses changing community needs. Supporting both Community-owned businesses and Community-controlled land together is part of an effort to democratize economic development in NYC's food system.

- Create a new Food Justice Fund to allocate \$5 million towards community-led projects to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities. In *Food Forward NYC*, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy calls for the establishment of a Food Justice Fund. We urge the City to invest in this program at \$5 Million and offer grants of at least \$500K to each grantee for both planning and implementation projects serving high need areas identified by Racial Equity Task Force. Funding would be allocated directly to community food organizations historically serving NYC residents with a demonstrated history of meeting the cultural and food needs of their communities. As this field of work requires long term investments, the fund should prioritize 2 year grant cycles and allow for flexibility on spending deadlines upon receiving grants. We also ask that the City explore a private-public partnership and leverage its convening power to secure matching investment from local philanthropic foundations. Types of projects funded under this pilot could include, but not be limited to:
  - <u>Worker Ownership</u>: activities may include establishing or providing technical assistance for worker cooperatives, Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and other employee-ownership models within the food system. Providing access to capital for employee ownership models in the food systems is a key strategy to build community ownership within the local food system, especially in BIPOC communities that have historically had low rates of business establishment by residents.
  - <u>Strengthen Food Systems and Supply Chain Infrastructure</u>: activities may include creating
    or expanding community kitchen programs, affordable kitchen and processing space,
    improving efficiency in food distribution; technical assistance to support MWBE from
    participating in the City's procurement contracts; local or climate-friendly food
    production or procurement; food recovery and waste management; support for support
    community food hub models, and community-owned food retail to leverage existing and
    growing community-owned food, health, farming and retail infrastructures; and
    data/technology projects.
  - <u>Growing Food System Career Pathways</u>: activities may include community based culinary training and workforce development opportunities to support regional rural and urban agriculture enterprises, especially for youth and BIPOC farmers, to create a pipeline of urban farming and food systems career opportunities.

#### Ensure All New York City Families Have Access To Healthy, Affordable Food

• Increase and baseline funding to a total of \$60 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC), formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). We are concerned about the apparent reappropriation of funds from last year's budget to this incredibly impactful program that addresses the ongoing hunger crises. Given rising levels of inflation and increased demand at emergency food providers across the state, we call on the Administration not to cut CFC, but rather to increase and baseline program funding for a total of \$60 million. New data from the New York Department of Health reported that nearly one in four (24.9%) New York adults experienced food insecurity within the past 12 months. Meanwhile, according to the 2023

New York City True Cost of Living Report, published by United Way of New York City, 50% of working age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs. Families struggling to make ends meet live in every NYC neighborhood but across family composition, work status, and education, the report finds that people of color are disproportionately likely to lack adequate income. Further, 80% of households below the True Cost of Living had at least one working adult and the presence of children in the household almost doubles the likelihood that a household will have inadequate income. This alarming data aligns with testimonials from food banks and food pantries across the state, the majority of whom observed a major uptick in households served last year.

A moderate increase in funding for the CFC would accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need, including the continuing influx of asylum seekers and other migrants seeking refuge in New York City. This increase will also help to address the inefficiencies found in using third-party vendors particularly in the procurement of kosher and halal items. Kosher- and halal-observant New Yorkers make up 21% of enrollees in GetFoodNYC and so it is critical the City's food assistance programs need to have sufficient kosher and/or halal certified product available and allocate funding to agencies that can effectively store and distribute that food in a culturally competent way. In addition to increased funding, we also request that HRA work with the Administration and Comptroller's Office to speed up payments to CFC providers, ensuring they have money up front to cover the administrative costs of implementing the program and are not required to obtain reimbursement for program services. Awaiting reimbursement is especially burdensome for new and small emergency food providers that may not have a line of credit or enough cash on hand to cover up front costs of implementing the CFC program. Finally, we urge HRA to engage in an outreach and education campaign to ensure smaller, community-based providers, especially those who have begun operating since the onset of the pandemic, are able to participate in the program, and adequately supported so that they are able to continue serving their communities.

- Maintain the Department of Education's Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS) to support school meal operations across the five boroughs. During this administration, New York City has taken major leaps forward with unprecedented commitment on improving school nutrition programs and ending child hunger. Through creative menu development and service advancements, plant forward meals, the full expansion of Cafeteria Enhancement to all middle and high schools, and expansion of availability of halal and kosher meals, more children are eating nutritious school meals each and every day. Because of these advancements, meal participation is back up to pre-pandemic levels, even factoring in the drop in enrollment. The data backs up this progress - there was an 8% increase in meal participation in the first part of this school year. We were pleased to see the Administration restore the originally proposed \$60 million cut as it was a direct threat to that progress and impact. We strongly urge these funds to be maintained in the final budget. Now, more than ever, as pandemic era programs come to an end and hunger continues to rise, we must continue to take every step possible to make sure NYC's school meals program is the best in the nation and connects more children with meals. New York City must continue to lead the nation in this work by investing resources in school meal programs.
- Invest in a 5% COLA for Human Services Workers. Government reliance on the nonprofit human services sector for a broad range of vital public services has steadily grown over at least the past three decades. During that time, total New York City employment in the core social assistance sector doubled, increasing more than two-and-a-half times as fast as total private sector employment. However, human service workers make between 20-35 percent less in median annual wages and benefits than workers in comparable positions in the public and private sector. As the sector has stretched to meet community needs, providers are met with chronic delays in payment, underfunding, and a lack of sincere collaboration to create meaningful and lasting interventions, which strips away limited resources. Therefore, we ask that the City includes a 5% COLA (\$150 million, with \$50 million already allocated from the Workforce Enhancement Initiative) in the FY25 budget and 3% COLAs for the next two years each year on the personal services line of all human services contracts is needed to ensure this vital workforce does not slip further into poverty.
- Invest new funding to combat hunger among older adults. Specifically, at least \$10.9 million is needed for inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for the NYC Aging home delivered meals program, at a per-meal reimbursement rate of at least \$15.31 per meal (above the current rate of \$12.78 per meal). This is especially urgent this year as NYC Aging has released a home delivered meals procurement that will sustain the program for the next three or more years.
- Maintain funding for NYCBenefits, a new program that enables CBOs to conduct benefits
  outreach and connect eligible New Yorkers to the billions of dollars of government benefits that
  are currently underutilized. This helps to ensure that New Yorkers are aware of the supports
  available, that accessing those supports is easy and efficient and that New Yorkers enroll and stay
  enrolled in these support programs. As a result of the OTPS freeze, the funding for this program

has only been released through June 30th, 2024. The original RFP was intended to run for three years and we are only in the second half of the first year. The program must continue so that CBOs can continue to do this work.

- Increase HRA's budget baseline to ensure it can engage community based organizations (CBOs) in benefits outreach and streamline benefits applications. Further, we recommend additional funding to facilitate a joint application system between the SNAP program (managed by NYC HRA) and the WIC program (managed by NYS DOH), aligning with Mayor Eric Adams' pledge to develop a MyCity portal for integrated applications. This system aims to simplify the application process, making it easier and more accessible for applicants to receive the benefits they need.
- Maintain funding for and evaluate the Grocery to Go Program. This program originally emerged in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic as food assistance for homebound New Yorkers and has since been redesigned to provide food insecure New Yorkers who also have hypertension and/or diabetes with monthly credit to purchase groceries through an online marketplace of local grocery stores. To make the program more impactful and ensure unspent credits do not go to waste we strongly recommend: 1) the monthly credits allotted to each participating household are increased to ensure that funds are reaching the individuals that the program is intended to serve, 2) expand the list for diet related conditions to widen the scale of the program, and 3) allow for the participation of young adults who meet the other eligibility criteria. Finally, we encourage the program to allow enrollees to have the freedom to use the credits on food items of their choosing that reflect need, cultural preference, dietary or medical requirements and personal taste. We strongly encourage the DOHMH not to apply additional limitations to eligible foods and to maintain that Grocery to Go credits can purchase SNAP approved items.
- We also urge full funding for the following City Council initiatives:
  - \$2.8 million for the Anti-Poverty Initiative
  - \$7.26 million in FY24 for food pantries
  - \$2.134 million for Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education, which funds farmers markets, urban farms, community gardens, and programs to expand the use of SNAP benefits
  - \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative (HRA)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Iyeshima Harris- Ouedraogo Policy Manager at Equity Advocates <u>iyeshima@nyequityadvocates.org</u>



Testimony of

Charisma Adams

exalt Youth Graduate

Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 22, 2024

Good Afternoon and thank you for the invitation here today. Council Member Stevens, I heard you speak on Monday at exalt at the Women's Month celebration. Thank you so much for sharing your story and giving us encouragement and advice. I really related to what you said and am grateful to have been there and met you.

I am here today to share MY story which is living proof that investing in young people pays off. My name is Charisma Adams. I am 18 years old and born and raised in Canarsie, Brooklyn. I have been to a few different High Schools, but now I attend Urban Dove and will graduate in **exactly 96 days.** 

I have to be honest with you, that 2 years ago, I did not think I would ever be this close to graduating high school. When I started high school I had a lot of anger issues. I got into a big fight with some other girls in my high school. The police were involved. Long story short, I was referred to *exalt*.

My experience at *exalt* was nothing short of life changing. I learned how to compose myself. I learned how to be professional. I made friends who have been through what I have been through. I also had teachers who had experiences like mine. That made me feel like I was understood and I didn't feel judged.I graduated from *exalt* in April of last year and now I am involved in their alumni program. In June I am headed to basic training in the Navy and I will become a medic.

I understand that what you all do, leading the city and choosing how to spend our money is not easy. <u>But I do know that spending money to make sure that teenagers like me have options like *exalt*, is the right move.</u>

I think it is very important that all the people who are involved with youth who get in trouble can help them become better people. Because I had that opportunity, I learned that *"The way you grew up is not the way you have to be."* 

Thank you again, Council Member Stevens and everyone here today for listening to my story.

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### elevating expectations for youth

Testimony of

Jason Alleyne Chief Program Officer

Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 22, 2024

#### OUTLINE:

• Good Morning, Chair Stevens, members of the Children and Youth Committee, all Council Members and the audience in attendance today. Thank you for all the work you do, and for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

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- I am Jason Alleyne, Chief Program Officer at *exalt*, a 501c3 that works with criminal justice involved youth ages 15-19 from all five boroughs. I am pleased to be here today representing our CEO Gisele Castro. Joining me today is an *exalt* Alumnus, Charisma Adams.
- This hearing is on the topic of the proposed funding levels for the agencies charged with supporting the youth of New York City. As is often said: "Budgets are a reflection of priorities.' Truly, can there be a higher priority than the future of our City, which rests in the hands of our young residents?
- At the core, and especially in the lingering wage of the pandemic impacts on youth, providing programs and services that educate and engage, that combat the underlying conditions that lead to the school to prison pipeline is essential for a strong future.
- We encourage the City to remain committed to providing robust resources to those youth programs such as SYEP and others that support teenagers especially during their out of school hours. We also support funding for ACS that will provide the staffing, resources and support to ensure that an experience of juvenile detention at Horizons or X, when that is necessary, is a path to a brighter future, not a lesson in delinquency.
- At exalt, we strongly support juvenile justice reforms, such as Raise the Age, and see the positive outcomes of that policy; however, we know that young people continue to be arrested and detained at troubling rates.
- exalt fundamentally believes that the <u>antidote to youth incarceration is innovation</u>.
- our one of a kind approach, which combines criminal justice intervention with court advocacy, educational reengagement and workforce preparedness proves that old adage that "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".
- At *exalt*, our graduates, once chronically truant or dropped out of school, are 98% on track to graduate or attain a GED within 2 years. 70% of the young people that come to us with open court cases have their sentences reduced or dismissed; 95% DO NOT

recidivate and 100% of our graduates complete an 8 week, 18 dollar-per-hour paid internship that provides economic power and a doorway to the world of meaningful work.

• *exalt* is grateful for the partnerships we have with a multitude of city agencies including ACS, DYCD, MOCJ, MOCS, NYPD, DOP, our District Attorneys, Judges and more, who make referrals and coordinate on multiple levels.

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- We strongly encourage this Committee to continue your critical work providing both oversight and resources so that the staff and programs of those agencies, so they are run efficiently and effectively, for the betterment of us all.
- Thank you again, Council Member Stevens, for the invitation to testify today. I would like to turn it over to Charism now, after which we are available to take your questions.



#### SASKIA TRAILL PRESIDENT & CEO EXPANDED SCHOOLS TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING: MARCH 22, 2024

My name is Saskia Traill and I am the President/CEO of ExpandED Schools. Thank you to Chair Stevens and the rest of the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to testify here today. It's a pleasure to work collaboratively with you all to strategize around access, equity, and quality when it comes to Extended Learning Time opportunities for young people across New York City.

ExpandED Schools is an afterschool intermediary that supports direct service community based organizations (CBO's) across the five boroughs in cultivating positive relationships with school leaders and delivering high quality afterschool programs to students and families. We distribute subgrants to CBO's (leveraging funds from City Council Citywide Discretionary allocations), provide robust professional development to afterschool staff, have a team of program managers that conduct site visits and provide day to day support to site directors, and convene site directors to learn from one another's practice. We also provide a similar level of technical assistance support to CBO's who we do not directly provide funding to, but who receive funding through New York City Public Schools' [via the Office of Community Schools (OCS)] state level Empire State After School Programs contract. We manage 74 partnerships through Citywide Initiatives with 41 distinct CBO partners in those portfolios and 67 partnerships with 30 distinct CBO's through OCS's Empire contract.

Our concerns about access to programming are two fold. First, at the City level, the administration's cut to COMPASS in the November Plan remains vague and sets an ominous precedent for the upcoming RFP. The November Plan called for a reduction of over 3,500 *underutilized* slots. The process of identifying said slots, and the process behind the subsequent removal of them, hasn't been clear. Looking ahead, there are almost \$7M reductions in the outyears, years that are supposed to be served by the upcoming RFP<sup>1</sup>. We strongly believe these reductions will create a greater strain on providers to deliver services, resulting in students and families at given schools no longer having access to afterschool enrichment programs.

Secondly, significant changes are happening at the state level with regard to the afterschool landscape that can have major implications for schools, CBO's, students and families in the City unless there is a clear plan of action. Although it should be celebrated that, in her Executive Budget, the governor streamlined the contracting process by combining the Empire and Advantage afterschool initiatives as well as put additional funding behind the program (the state senate subsequently added even more funds in their one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/peg11-23.pdf</u>



house budget response), there are some concerns about how the state Office of Children and Family Services' recently released RFP for the new program, Learning and Enrichment After School Program Supports (LEAPS), will play out on the ground<sup>2</sup>.

Although the RFP is quite groundbreaking and a positive response to the field in many ways, ExpandED and our partners have the following concerns:

- The contracts cover students up to the age of 12 excluding most middle schoolers and all high schoolers. This automatically cuts state level funding for a significant amount of students that are currently being served by those dollars. When considering the fact that, although the City put \$80M in permanent funding toward the NYCPS side of summer rising<sup>3</sup>, the summer rising cut under the DYCD portfolio still remains and primarily impacts hours and programming for middle school students. Thereby, further divesting from an important student population across the city.
- 2. NYCPS will not be able to apply for an award since the application is limited to CBO's. Therefore, all CBO's that run a program under the NYCPS contract will need communication from OCS to be clear about the fact that they will need to apply independently to ensure that they have a chance of sustaining programs for the schools in which they exist.
- 3. No awardee can serve more than three schools per school district, a cap that doesn't exist right now. Therefore, CBOs who serve more than three schools in any district via Empire/Advantage will need to develop a strategy to determine who they will continue to serve and who they won't. Also they will need to determine what will happen to the students and families they serve at the buildings that don't make the cut under this new framework. Partners such as Maspeth Town Hall (Community School District 24), NIA Community Services Network (Community School District 10), St. Nick Alliance (Community School District 14)<sup>4</sup> just to name a few are going to be put in a difficult position.
- 4. The LEAPS RFP requires a signed commitment from the applicant and the school district of each proposed site. So if OCS doesn't designate themselves as the signee since they are familiar with Empire and, therefore, it is left to the individual superintendents that might be an additional hurdle for CBO's depending on superintendents' familiarity with the funding stream.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/leaps-after-school.php</u>

https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/029-24/mayor-adams-restores-funding-community-schools-makes-n ew-investments-summer-rising-for#/0

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>https://www.nyskwic.org/map/poiDownload.cfm</u>



In conjunction with some of this higher level systems work around budget, communication and partnership as it relates to these contracts, we at ExpandED Schools are ready, willing, and able to play a role as well. We are grateful and proud of what we have been able to do in partnership with the council through our **\$4.0M Afterschool Enrichment Citywide Initiative Award in FY24**. Programs mostly leverage the subgrants we distribute to fill gaps that either enable them to fortify their staffing, serve more students, or engage in other inputs around program quality. However, for a few, the subgrant is their primary public funding stream. For that reason, unless pushed by the CBO partner, we never take funding away from a given site. Therefore, the only way to scale our work is with additional funding. With our **FY25 ask of \$6.0M**, we would have greater capacity to serve some middle and high schools where there are newly developed gaps and support DYCD funded programs whose funding get cut to whatever degree. We would also love to work in partnership with each individual council member in order to identify school partners in need of our support because you all know your constituency and districts best.

Thank you again to Chair Stevens and the rest of the committee for holding this hearing and for all the work that you do for children and families across the City. With the Administration for Children Services (ACS) newly added to this body's work scope, the responsibilities have grown, but it's clear the due diligence has not wavered. I look forward to continuing to be a partner in services to young people and community, particularly when it comes to extended learning time enrichment programming and the cultivation of the safe and validating spaces that they deserve.

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**Testimony of FPWA** 

Presented to: New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Preliminary Budget Hearing Hon. Chair Althea V. Stevens March 22, 2024

> Jennifer Jones Austin Executive Director/CEO

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We are grateful to the Council Committee on Children and Youth for holding this hearing, and to Chair Stevens for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of FPWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies).

FPWA is an anti-poverty policy and advocacy organization committed to advancing economic opportunity, justice, and upward mobility for New Yorkers with low incomes. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and we strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

FPWA also has a membership network of more than 170 faith and community-based organizations. We support our members by offering workshops and trainings on topics such as leadership development, organizational management, and trauma-informed approaches to service delivery. FPWA also provides a range of financial assistance grants through our member network, working to strengthen individuals and families at the ground level. These grants provide direct support to New Yorkers in the form of scholarships, financial assistance for aging adults, funding for organizations providing HIV/AIDS related services, and more.

The City Council's Preliminary Budget Hearings for Fiscal Year 2025 come at a critical time for the city, as many New Yorkers are struggling just to make ends meet. A recent report released by FPWA in partnership with the University of Washington revealed a sobering picture of economic deprivation across New York City and State, finding that nearly two out of five households—or nearly 40% of New Yorkers—are struggling to afford just the basics, like paying rent, feeding their families, and affording child care.<sup>1</sup> In parts of New York City, that number is even higher. For example, in Queens County and Kings County, 49% of households are struggling to meet basic needs, and in the Bronx, a staggering 65% of households are struggling to meet basic needs.<sup>2</sup> This widespread economic deprivation is severely harming children and youth across our city, and this year's budget presents an opportunity to make critical investments in the services and supports that they need most.

At FPWA, we believe that all New York City children deserve access to quality, affordable child care and early education, so they can learn and grow in a safe and nurturing environment. We also believe that a child's race, family income, or immigration status should not determine the quality of their early and continual development. Children also deserve to have access to quality services outside of school, including youth development programming, afterschool, summer camp, and more. However, the FY25 Preliminary Budget includes devastating cuts to these vital services.

## Given this context, FPWA urges the following investments to be included in the FY25 New York City Budget:

- Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)
  - Restore \$6.9 million for Comprehensive After School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC)
  - Restore \$19.6 million for the Summer Rising program
  - Invest \$16.45 to strengthen Runaway & Homeless Youth (RHY) services, including \$1.63 million for one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded drop-in centers; \$1.5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NY\_FPWA\_BriefOne.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NY2023\_FPWA\_TechnicalBrief.pdf

million to maintain funding for housing specialists in the DYCD-RHY System; and \$5.6 million to fund an additional 100 DYCD RHY beds

- Restore \$5.4 million cut to the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) for FY25-FY27
- Administration for Children's Services (ACS)
  - Support the child care workforce with a wage increase and benefits beyond compensation, such as increased access to affordable health care, child care, and housing assistance
  - Restore and baseline \$20 million to provide affordable, subsidized child care to undocumented families
  - Allocate additional funding for indigent defense in family court

These investments are particularly needed due to concerning, longer-term funding trends in New York City, as highlighted by our <u>NYC Funds Tracker</u>. For example, the NYC Funds Tracker shows that city investment in ACS has fallen over the past 10 years. Between FY11 and FY23, ACS' budget has decreased by over 17% in real terms, falling from \$3.60 billion to just \$2.98 billion. This continual divestment in human services agencies is particularly concerning given the impact that the uneven pandemic recovery has had on the city's children and youth.

#### **Essential Youth Services at Risk**

Afterschool programs are critical not just for children but also for parents across New York City. However, the Preliminary Budget proposes a \$6.9 million cut to Comprehensive After School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC), which will result in the loss of 3,538 slots for youth, while the cuts to Summer Rising will also prevent youth from having field trips and a full 5 days of programming from 8am to 6pm. This will decrease the amount of citywide funding dedicated to afterschool programming overall, which will result in even less funding in DYCD's forthcoming afterschool procurement. These cuts would devastate these programs, their workforce, and detrimentally impact access to care for children, youth, and families. We therefore urge the City Council to save afterschool and youth programs by restoring \$6.9 million for COMPASS afterschool and \$19.6 million for the Summer Rising program.

#### Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Strengthening Community Safety

DYCD funds critical services for Runaway & Homeless Youth that include drop-in centers, emergency shelter, crisis intervention, transitional housing, and street outreach to provide food, clothing, and other essentials. We cannot turn our back on youth who need these vital supports, so we urge the city to include an additional \$16.45 million in the FY25 budget, specifically:

- \$1.63 million for one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded drop-in center contracts
- \$5.6 million to fund 100 additional DYCD RHY beds (60 beds for 16–20-year-olds, 40 beds for 21–24-year-olds)
- \$5.5 million to "right-size" RHY Residential Contracts
- \$1.6 million to restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System
- \$625,000 to fund Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services

Through the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), DYCD funds Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System (CMS), which is a network of community-led organizations that, utilizing credible messengers, works to prevent violence in communities where rates of gun violence are high. There are currently 30 Cure Violence sites operating throughout the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island and Queens. To support this work, we ask that the city restore November Plan PEG in the amount of \$5.471 million to the Office of Neighborhood Safety for FY25, FY26 and FY27.

In addition to restoring funding for youth services, we urge the city to address operational challenges that have undercut the ability of providers to sustain their programs and are ultimately reducing access to services for families. To address these challenges, we ask that the city invest in the following initiatives:

- Workforce:
  - Increase the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of no less than \$22/hour for staff and ensure year-round contracting.
- Enrollment and Access:
  - Prioritize consumer-centered outreach and enrollment, including by enabling CBOs providing youth services to directly enroll children and youth onsite, and by taking immediate action to stand up community-rooted application and enrollment facilitators that prioritize expediting access to youth services (afterschool and summer programming) in partnership with CBOs.
  - Establish year-round, 12-month youth services and shift to a K-8 summer program model.
- On Time and Full Payment:
  - Pay youth service providers on time and catch up on payments owed.
  - Fully staff DOE and DYCD divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and make permanent the ability of youth service providers to batch multiple months of invoices.
  - Release a new RFP for the SONYC and COMPASS contracts that covers the full and actual cost of care.

#### New York City Can Do More to Expand Access to Quality, Affordable Child Care

Access to quality, affordable child care is not only essential for the economic well-being of families in New York City, but it is also essential for the well-being of our economy and our city as a whole. We applaud the historic investment in child care made by the state last year, which helped expand access to assistance and provide some support for the child care workforce, and FPWA <u>continues to advocate for</u> the necessary investments in child care from the state. These investments include a permanent state child care fund to increase child care worker compensation, as well as expanding access to families who are currently prevented from accessing child care due to immigration status rules, enhancing access to non-traditional hour care, and preventing other access barriers.

But New York City also has a responsibility to invest in the child care sector. With more than 80% of families with children under 5 unable to afford child care in New York City, this is a crisis both for families and for our economy.<sup>3</sup> In 2022 alone, the city is estimated to have lost \$23 billion in economic activity as a result of parents leaving the workforce or downshifting careers to meet child care needs.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of the fight for universal access to quality, affordable child care must be the workforce, without whom there is no path to making this a reality in New York City. Child care workers are almost entirely women and are disproportionately women of color and continue to be underpaid and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2023/10/CCC-From-Birth-to-Age-12-Child-Care-Affordabilityand-Cost-Burden.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://fiveboro.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/InvestingInFamiliesAndOurFutureFinal.pdf

undervalued despite the vital work they do each day. The average wage for child care workers in New York State is just \$35,190, one of the lowest among all professions.<sup>5</sup> In fact, 98% of occupations in New York City pay more than child care.<sup>6</sup> This is unacceptable. All members of the child care workforce should receive compensation parity with similar positions in the public school system. In addition to better wages, the city should provide benefits beyond compensation, such as increased access to affordable health care, child care, pension plans, housing stipends, and loan forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, it is critical to ensure that families with children whose immigration status makes them ineligible for other federally-funded subsidized child care can have the same access as other families. "Promise NYC" was rolled out in December of 2022 to provide child care assistance to low-income families with children whose immigration status makes them ineligible for other federally-funded subsidized child care. ACS contracted with four community-based organizations to launch the program. Now, it is imperative that the city restore and baseline \$20 million to provide affordable, subsidized child care to undocumented families.

### City Council Should Allocate Additional Funding for Indigent Defense in Family Court

The mission of ACS is to protect and promote the safety and well-being of New York City's children, young people, families, and communities. The policies and practices of this agency concerning the child welfare or family regulation system have fallen short of these aims. ACS has failed to address the ways in which poverty is often conflated with abuse and neglect, and how structural racism impacts the enforcement of abuse and neglect in criminal and family law. Rather than guiding families into public benefits and services that may address food, clothing, or housing needs of children, ACS often takes a punitive approach.

This issue was highlighted in FPWA's *End the Poverty to Prison Pipeline* report, which notes that investigations can lead to loss of child custody, termination of parental rights, criminal involvement, and barriers to reunification after reentry from prison.<sup>8</sup> These negative outcomes leave lasting scars on children. In New York City, about 45% of Black and Latinx children experience an ACS investigation before the age of 18. These investigations are traumatic for children and families due to the invasiveness of investigations.<sup>9</sup> The overly punitive approach has led Black families to be less frequently mandated to services in place of removal and children to experience longer spans in foster care.<sup>10</sup> It is imperative that low-income families receive representation in family court, so we urge the City Council to increase funding for the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice to provide indigent defense for parents and guardians facing ACS investigation or possible removal of their children.

A report commissioned by ACS detailed the heightened surveillance and scrutiny faced by Black and Brown New Yorkers and the practices of ACS caseworkers pushing their way into homes without

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.dccnyinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Enduring-Value-of-the-Early-Childhood-Workforce-9-2023-2.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://fiveboro.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/InvestingInFamiliesAndOurFutureFinal.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FPWAs-Ending-the-Poverty-to-Prison-Pipeline-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> https://familypolicynyc.org/report/scr/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> https://www.centernyc.org/urban-matters-2/from-surveillance-and-control-to-family-assistance-and-support

informing parents and guardians of their rights.<sup>11</sup> A class action filed against ACS last month details claims of the same coercive practices of caseworkers showing up at homes without court order and issuing threats of family separation to goad consent to enter.<sup>12</sup> These reports are extremely troubling. We call upon the City Council to pass Int 0096-2024,<sup>13</sup> which would require ACS to provide a multilanguage disclosure form to families before entering homes, and to reintroduce Int 0865-2022<sup>14</sup> this session to require ACS to verbally inform parents and guardians of their rights before conducting a search.<sup>15</sup>

Thank you for your time and your attention to these critical issues. FPWA looks forward to working with you to make meaningful investments in the economic security of New Yorkers in the FY25 budget. To do so, it is critical that the budget focuses on improving access to child care and youth services and prioritizing family and child well-being across all agencies. Rather than cutting critical programs and the agencies that administer them, the city should invest in improving these programs, which are essential to promoting economic security and protecting the dignity of all New Yorkers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/nyregion/nyc-acs-racism-abuse-neglect.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/20/nyregion/acs-nyc-family-trauma-lawsuit.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6509497&GUID=898BF0D0-CE4C-42DA-826B-AD96FBE07E4F&Options=Advanced&Search=

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5971641&GUID=4B08872F-0D7C-4294-BDFA-A35682C6CCE9&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=child+protective+services

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5971641&GUID=4B08872F-0D7C-4294-BDFA-A35682C6CCE9&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=child+protective+services



### NYC City Council Committee on Youth & Children's Services Preliminary Budget Hearings -Public Testimony March 22, 2024

To The NYC City Council Committee on Youth & Children's Services:

Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project (formerly the Peter Cicchino Youth Project) of the Urban Justice Center, I would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Youth and Children's Services for convening this important hearing. My name is Amy Leipziger, and I am the Project Director of the Free to Be Youth Project.

### Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to Be Youth Project (FYP) is a direct legal service provider dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are low-income, living on the streets, in homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system, or in foster care. We regularly travel to Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) drop-in centers, such as the Ali Forney Center, Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project, and Covenant House, where homeless youth congregate to offer direct legal services and know-your-rights workshops. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing, and being wrongly turned away from our City's homeless shelters.

### The Department of Youth & Community Development

The shelter crisis at DYCD is already dire, with insufficient resources to meet the needs of a growing unhoused youth population. From July 2023 to December 2023, at total of 482 youth were "turned away" from DYCD shelters.<sup>1</sup> This number is almost a 7000% increase from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local\_Law\_79\_Runaway-and-</u> Homeless\_Youth\_Shelter\_Access\_july\_to\_December-2023\_Final.pdf LL79 July - Dec 2023



2023 January-June report, where only 7 youth were reportedly turned away from the shelters.<sup>2</sup> These reports define a "turned away" youth as an individual that was not able to be matched to a DYCD funded bed on the day they sought placement. When turned away from the system, these youth are stranded without alternatives, thereby exacerbating the challenges they are navigating as unhoused youth in the city. While some of this statistical increase can be attributed to improved data collection and sourcing, it is clear the demand for resources has grown beyond what DYCD can maintain with its current funding.

Mayor Adams claims that this is the result of the so-called "migrant crisis," but in reality, this tipping point where young people are being turned away from critical, and often life-saving shelter and support services, is a reflection of systemic and pervasive deficits in public service, housing insecurity, and socio-economic inequality. As new arrivals, young migrants are disproportionately impacted by these systems, pushing them into cycles of homelessness and criminalization. While this indicates a pressing need for targeted immigration support services in the DYCD system, many youth, like our clients, have faced unique challenges in navigating the shelter system and accessing support. The cuts in the coming fiscal year will only exacerbate the shelter crisis, pushing more young people into unstable living situations and hindering their ability to access essential services. The city must prioritize the needs of our most vulnerable with legal services and additional support available to young new arrivals and unaccompanied minors.

Introducing youth-specific immigration legal services is critical to effectively support and protect vulnerable youth populations. The city is grappling with an influx of immigrant youth seeking refuge from violence, persecution, and instability in their home countries, but the availability of specialized legal assistance has remained insufficient. These services not only ensure that youth have access to crucial legal protections and pathways to residency or asylum but also help them navigate complex immigration systems with guidance and support.

While the barriers to seeking services can be daunting for a young person, the sooner they can meet with an immigration advocate, the more options remain open. This can create a lifeline for the homeless and marginally housed youth in New York. A change in status often leads to secure housing, stable employment, and better access to healthcare, financial aid, and much-needed public assistance.

By integrating youth-specific immigration legal services into DYCD shelters, we can empower immigrant youth to secure their rights, advocate for their safety, and ultimately transition into

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local\_Law\_79\_Runaway-and-Homeless\_Youth\_Shelter\_Access-January-to-June-2023.pdf</u>



stable housing. This self-sufficiency is essential for emerging adults like our clients, who are currently working to become part of the culture and workforce of our city. Equipping young migrants to become vibrant community members and find stable employment makes our city stronger.

### Impact on Unhoused LGBTQ+ Youth

In New York City, estimates of homeless youth can be as high as 20,000, though an accurate estimate of the number of homeless youth in New York City is difficult to obtain, as many are completely disconnected from services. As the city is a magnet for teens thrown out of their homes, as well as those unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 that have arrived in the city in the last three years, all without stable housing, the actual numbers for these youth may be even higher.

Young people become homeless for many complex reasons including family conflict, shortage of affordable housing, family poverty, violence, abuse or neglect in the home, mental illness or substance abuse among family members, challenges at school. Others are rejected by their families or experience family conflict because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, an unplanned pregnancy, use of drugs or alcohol, or inability to comply with parent/caretaker rules. Unsurprisingly, LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately impacted by these factors, with national statistics citing that nearly 40% of unhoused youth self-identify as LGBTQ+. This suggests that there are likely, at minimum, 8,000 homeless LGBTQ+ youth in New York City, lacking the legal, financial, and social resources needed to live independently. Without access to the proper supports, our clients find themselves in dire circumstances, often more precarious than the ones that brought them to our door in the first place.

Even before a young person is considered runaway or homeless, they have likely experienced trauma. This trauma is only exacerbated each day they are without services, creating an overwhelming lack of stability. For young people, this can impact their ability to continue with school, or find and maintain employment. As a result, homeless LGBTQ+ youth are two to four times more likely to report depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. Notably, homeless LGBTQ+ youth are also more likely to experience bullying, sexual assault, violence, trauma, HIV infection, and substance abuse than either heterosexual or stably housed LGBTQ+ peers. Queer youth of color are hit the hardest, particularly when examining the elevated risk of involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system due to their homelessness.



Our clients came to New York seeking refuge from these abhorrent circumstances, and are only further traumatized by the very systems in place that are intended to stabilize, not derail, them. Funding youth-specific immigration legal services, like those offered by FYP, and additional support services for youth new arrivals and unaccompanied minors, would set migrant youth up to become assets in our city's community and economy.

- A. Dan, a young twenty-one year old man from Mauritania came to us after escaping homophobic and racist violence endorsed by the government of his home country. In addition to seeking immigration relief, Dan was struggling because he was unable to find any services or support that could communicate with him in his particular dialect. With our assistance, Dan was connected with language support that has been instrumental as we help him navigate the asylum process, and secure him a work authorization that will enable him to obtain meaningful employment in the city.
- B. Fleeing from his violent family in Morocco, Sam soughtour help in the asylum application process after being threatened with deportation. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Sam faced significant harm and trauma in his country making it unsafe for him to ever return. While navigating this process, Sam has needed the assistance of shelter services, public benefits and Medicaid to ensure he can receive medical support. Our office has continued to work with him through these processes.
- C. After escaping his violent household, Brad, a nineteen-year-old from El Salvador, came to us seeking replacement immigration documents that his stepmother had refused to release to him. Not only did we get help him get a temporary order of protection from his abuser, but we were able to get his documents returned. We are now working with him to get the protection and benefits he needs to move forward.

These stories are not isolated, or unique, but while our clients have been fortunate enough to obtain our services, equipping them with the advocacy tools they need to transition from homelessness to stable housing, there are thousands of migrant youth in the city that don't have access to these essential resources. Our capacity is limited, as are the capacities of our partner organizations, and more support is needed. We are currently staffed by a Project Director, two attorneys, and an outreach associate, relying on the assistance of volunteers and pro bono support to ensure excellent legal advocacy for our clients. We cannot be everywhere at once, and the needs of the community will soon outpace our abilities, especially with the proposed budget cuts.

### **Conclusion**

Budget cuts will not solve this crisis, a lasting commitment to protecting our most vulnerable will. Our budget ask for FY2025 is as follows:



### Free to Be Youth Project

40 Rector St. 9th Floor New York, NY 10006 (877) 716-1446 fyp@urbanjustice.org

### • Fund Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services: \$625,000

- Young people in DYCD programs have been excluded from access to city-funded legal support, and most young people qualify for youth-specific immigration relief (ie SIJS) that the city does not currently fund. Funding should be made immediately available for five positions for full-time experienced lawyers, who will be awarded to DYCD-funded RHY programs through an RFP based on the documented need for such services.
- Fund Support Services for Youth New Arrivals and Unaccompanied Minors: \$1.63M
  - DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers have been going above and beyond to meet the growing needs of newly arrived youth and unaccompanied minors without any additional support. We are asking for a one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Center contracts. This additional funding will support meeting the basic needs of young people and fund more appropriate staffing across the sites.

Without adequate support services, young, queer, and trans unhoused new New Yorkers will continue to face shelter turn aways and struggle to access the advocacy resources they need to become successful contributors to the New York City community. Thank you to the members of this Committee and to the community of youth advocates who have been working hard to address the needs of this community. The Free to Be Youth Project stands ready to assist the NYC City Council Committee on Youth & Children's Services in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

/s/ AL

Amy Leipziger, Esq. Project Director Free to Be Youth Project Urban Justice Center 40 Rector Street, 9th Floor New York, NY 10006 aleipziger@urbanjustice.org



Testimony of Dalvin Bartley Mid-Atlantic Program Manager, Generation Citizen March 22, 2024 New York City Council

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Julie Hudman, Chair Jane Lo, Vice Chair Priscila Guillen Marjorie Innocent Ishrat Jahan Fallon Manyika Jake Mazeitis Joseph McGeehin Hanna Rodriguez-Farrar Matt Segneri Savannah Slayton Mary Vascellaro Scott Warren Thank you, Chair Stevens and Council Members of the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Generation Citizen ("GC") in today's preliminary budget hearing. My name is Dalvin Bartley and I am a Mid-Atlantic Program Manager at Generation Citizen. Via our "Action Civics" curriculum, secondary school students apply social studies learning to the real world by studying and advocating on an issue of importance in their communities.

Generation Citizen is thankful for the Council's \$500,000 investment this year in our programming and youth civics education through the *Civics Education in New York City Schools Initiative*. The City Council has generously funded this initiative for Generation Citizen since 2017, originally meant to support our programming in 125 classrooms. Since then, our footprint in New York City has more than doubled. In this 2023-24 school year, we are serving over 250 New York City classrooms serving approximately 6,250 students. To ensure that we can continue to provide our services at this level across the city and meet the growing demand, Generation Citizen seeks an enhancement of \$100,000 to the initiative for a total of \$600,000 in FY25 to support the expansion of programming across the City.

As a concerned advocate for youth development and community well-being, I stand before you today to emphasize the critical importance of robust youth programming in our great city. Our young people are not only our future; they are our present, and investing in their growth and empowerment is an investment in the resilience and prosperity of New York. Summer programs play a pivotal role in shaping young minds. They provide safe spaces for learning, creativity, and social interaction. By participating in enriching activities during the summer months, our youth gain valuable skills, build friendships, and explore their passions. These programs foster personal growth, prevent learning loss, and contribute to a sense of community. Our youth face unique challenges, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and mental health concerns. Effective youth programming integrates mental health services, providing counseling, coping strategies, and emotional support. By addressing mental health early, we empower our youth to navigate life's complexities with resilience and hope.

Youth programs foster a sense of belonging and civic engagement. When young people actively participate in community service, volunteer work, and neighborhood improvement projects, they develop a sense of responsibility and pride. They become invested in the well-being of their communities, contributing to safer streets, cleaner parks, and stronger bonds among residents. Youth programming offers skill-building opportunities that extend beyond the classroom. Whether it's coding workshops, arts and crafts, sports, or leadership training, these experiences equip our young residents with practical skills and confidence. They learn teamwork, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability—essential attributes for success in an ever-evolving world.

GC is a 13 year-old national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to demystifying democracy for youth by bringing civics education into the classroom through Action Civics. Action Civics is a "student-centered, project-based approach to civics education that develops the individual skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for 21st century democratic practice" (National Action Civics Collaborative). It differs from normative, knowledge-based civic education in the same way that taking any "hands-on," project-based, or experiential course differs from reading a textbook. Students learn about democratic structures and processes by directly engaging with them, as well as with each other, to address one or more issues they care about, which are impacting their community. As we deliberate on budget allocations, I urge the City Council to listen attentively to providers. Those on the front lines—educators, mentors, and community organizations—understand the unique needs of our youth. Their insights are invaluable. Let us collaborate with them to design effective, culturally responsive programs that resonate with our diverse population.

In conclusion, investing in youth programming is not a luxury; it is a strategic imperative. By nurturing our young minds, we create a ripple effect that extends far beyond individual lives. We shape a more vibrant, compassionate, and resilient New York—one where every young person has the opportunity to thrive. GC is incredibly thankful for the City Council's renewed funding despite myriad challenges and budgetary concerns in the last few years. GC hopes to continue partnering with the Council and the Department of Youth and Community Development to continue bringing high quality civics education to our City schools.

Thank you for your commitment to our city's future. I can be reached at dbartley@generationcitizen.org with any questions or comments.



### Children and Youth Committee Hearing March 22, 2024

Submitted by: Maurice Rawls Manhattan Program Supervisor Grand St. Settlement

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, and members of the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth.

# The City must restore \$6.9 million in afterschool funding by extending the COMPASS Explore contracts, and restoring cuts to SONYC programming. This funding cut will disproportionately impact low income youth of color.

My name is Maurice Rawls, and I am the Manhattan Program Supervisor at Grand St. Settlement, a 108 year old settlement house providing direct services to toddlers up to older adults. Grand St. empower, supports, and advocates on behalf of low-income and immigrant communities in the Lower East Side as well as across Brooklyn. In fiscal year 2024 we served 6,300 young people between the ages of K-12. NYC government contracts out a lot of youth programming to non-profits such as Grand Street to save on costs. Non-profits like ours, and our friends who are a part of Human Services Council as well as United Neighborhood Houses, are agile and provide high quality services. I'm submitting this testimony today to call attention to the 3,500 School's Out NYC (SONYC) and City's Comprehensive Afterschool System Explore (COMPASS) slots that are on the chopping block.

### Grand Street's After School Programming

As asylum seekers continue to arrive in New York, the needs for our public schools continue to grow. The SONYC program provides critical enrichment activities to middle school students, including the newest New Yorkers. Meanwhile, COMPASS programs supports literacy for elementary school students and social support for high school students. The \$6.9 million cut to COMPASS and SONYC programs would deeply impact underserved communities, and Grand St's programming. These cuts will result in the discontinuance of health and wellness afterschool activities for 75 students at our COMPASS elementary school site in East NY. Even more damaging, our SONYC program located at Cornelia Connelly Center; an all girl private school in the Lower East Side, is facing a cut from 50 to 35 slots starting in the 2024-2025 school year. This program enables young Black and latinas girls to gain exposure to STEAM and athletics that they may not otherwise engage in. Finally, the COMPASS high school program situated in Lower East Side Prep High School at 145 Stanton Street would be entirely

Bryan Koplin President, Board of Directors

Ralph W. Rose Chair, Board of Directorss Robert Cordero Chief Executive Officer





abolished. This would impact 30 high school students including recent asylum seekers from Latin America and the Caribbean. Our COMPASS program helps students fill our financial aid forms for college, work on their resume, and craft their elevator pitch. The program is overenrolled.

### **Conclusion**

The COMPASS portfolio, overseen by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), provides critical free enrichment opportunities for young people across the city. These programs help kids stay safe and expand their learning opportunities when schools have dismissed for the day and during the summer months. According to the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for FY24, demand for afterschool programming increased in recent months. Participation in both COMPASS and SONYC programs increased 3% in the first four months of FY24 as compared to the same period in FY23.

A reduction to afterschool funding would be damaging, especially to low-income youth of color. It would decrease the number of youth served and the amount of citywide funding dedicated to afterschool programming. The City must restore \$6.9 million in afterschool funding by extending the COMPASS Explore contracts, and restoring cuts to SONYC programming.

Thank you for reading this testimony. Grand St. values the partnership with the City Council and will continue to advocate against these cuts.

Moe Rawls, Manhattan Program Supervisor Grand St. Settlement mrawls@grandsettlement.org

Bryan Koplin President, Board of Directors

Ralph W. Rose Chair, Board of Directorss Robert Cordero Chief Executive Officer



# **JCCA** Repair the world child by child

Committee on Youth Services TOPIC: Preliminary Budget Hearing Friday, March 22, 2024

Testimony by Amiee Abusch Senior Vice President of Foster Care, Prevention, and Community Partnership JCCA

Good morning Chair Stevens and members of the Youth Services Committee. Thank you for calling this hearing and inviting JCCA to testify on behalf of the children and families we provide with child welfare, mental health, and educational assistance.

Today I am speaking on behalf of Ronald E. Richter, JCCA's CEO, and all of JCCA. My name is Amiee Abusch, Senior Vice President of Foster Care, Prevention, and Community Partnership at JCCA. I have spent most of my career in child welfare. I began as an ACS Child Protective Services (CPS) worker and later served as a clinical consultant, Preventive Director, and Vice President for Foster Care Programs. I have worked with hundreds of frontline human services providers throughout my career and admire their dedication to at-risk populations across New York City. JCCA is a child and family services agency that works with about 17,000 of New York State's children and families each year. We provide foster and residential care, educational assistance and remediation, and behavioral health services. JCCA's wellness supports for young people struggling with emotional challenges are critical to preventing and addressing family dysfunction and instability.

I am here to ask for a greater investment in city-funded programs that help youth in challenging situations realize their fullest potential.

### A. Services JCCA provides

JCCA is a provider of prevention and foster care services, primarily funded by ACS. Our prevention programs are aimed at helping families resolve immediate problems, thereby keeping children safely at home. As a foster care agency, JCCA provides Fair Futures coaching, which offers transition-aged youth with education and workforce development supports as they move into adulthood.

Like other service providers, for the past year and a half, we volunteered at a shelter in Brooklyn to provide education supports, clinical services, resource access and navigation support, and wrap-around support including emergency food, clothing, formula, diapers and hygiene products and more. We are proud to provide this volunteer work, but cannot sustain the expense. JCCA estimates it cost \$350,000 per year for us to provide these volunteer services in migrant shelters.

Additionally, JCCA provides Arches; a Department of Probation funded mentoring program that serves justice-involved youth.

For today's hearing, I would like to highlight our Prevention services. Through these programs, we provide families with critical supports through evidence-based models such as Functional Family Therapy, Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Family Treatment Rehabilitation, and Solution Based Casework. These services have provided a transformative experience for many of our families. I'd like to offer an example. During February 2023, we received a referral for a family experiencing a series of incidents; including physical and verbal fights between the child and her parents and her older sister, as well as the family's inability to regulate the child's mood and behavior. The child was also a victim of sexual abuse and did not feel supported by her family. During the first meeting, our Therapist listened to their concerns and established rapport so that the family would feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. Throughout the course of treatment, the family made significant progress, allowing the child and her mother to develop positive communication. The child's mother noted that she is less reactive and better at listening to her child's concerns. An improvement in the child's academic performance was noted. The family is now looking apply what they learn and hold more family activities, focusing on quality time. The family recommends these types of services to others in similar situations.

Like many other providers, JCCA was concerned about the recent PEGs. While we were fortunate to not have our programs severely impacted, other providers were not so fortunate. We know that there are many families who are experiencing crises that may cause them to become involved with the child welfare system. We do not want to see a future where these budget cuts cause families to miss out on much needed services.

### What can New York City Council do?

### 1. Expand program funding

I ask that City Council expand funding for prevention services. I also encourage City Council to continue fostering collaboration among city agencies to preserve and expand funding for other

youth programs like Arches that reflect the true cost to provide efficient services. These programs have a tremendous impact on youth and families and we want to ensure that they have the capacity to reach all New Yorkers who need them.

### 2. Ask the state to increase prevention reimbursement rates

I also encourage the City to advocate that the State to increase reimbursement of prevention services to localities. Currently, the state reimburses 62% percent of prevention services, which represents a cut after many years of reimbursing at a rate of 65%. Please partner with Assemblymember Hevesi and Senator Brisport in their proposal of a 75% state reimbursement in bills A.2807/S.5326. The City has made great progress in reducing the foster care population and Prevention services are instrumental in this success, stabilizing at-risk families with increasingly complex needs.

### 3. Fund for services for migrant families

I encourage City Council to provide funding for service providers providing volunteer services to migrant families residing in shelters. JCCA and other human services agencies have stepped in to fill the gap in services and provide basic necessities to migrants in shelters. Please develop a fund to support this work. JCCA alone estimates we spend \$350,000 each year on volunteer services to migrants in shelters.

### Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human service workers

On one final note, thank you Council member Stevens for your tireless advocacy for our human service workers. We are happy to hear the Mayor's announcement of a 3% COLA for each of the next three years. Our workers are on the frontlines ensuring that children and families are equipped with critical supports; they will be delighted to see their wages increase.

### Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to consider the needs of children and their families in our city. Together with service providers like JCCA, the City can build an infrastructure that supports young New Yorkers in achieving their goals and dreams.



### March 22,2024

### PROGRAMS

Adult & Family Services • After School • Child Sexual Abuse • **Treatment & Prevention** College Directions • Early Head Start • Early Learn/ UPK/Head Start • ESOL-Immigration Services • Family Childcare Network • Special Needs • Summer Camp • Teen Center •

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Member of:

Good afternoon elected officials and representatives,

On behalf of KHCC, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to have our contribution to this important discussion counted with others who are using their voice this afternoon. After school programming is an integral part of our society, ensuring that our youth have access to safe spaces to learn or receive education and resources that are not available to them in school. After school programs engage students in ways and areas that may not be possible during the school day based on the objectives and obligations that schools are required to meet. After school programs participants receive SEL groups, STEM activities, internship opportunities, hot meals, trips, advocacy, exposure to post-secondary education and careers, and have an opportunity to be with fellow youth to develop socially in order to be more tolerant and emotionally developed adults. That should be the goal.

Provide opportunities and resources to youth to overcome the external/internal factors in themselves, families, and communities in order to thrive and break cycles of poverty and inequity as they progress through life. In my role as a social worker since the pandemic, I have administered numerous mental health assessments and have had countless conversations in groups and 1:1 where youth have expressed apprehension, trepidation, and ambiguity about their ability to obtain a career that will sustain them as an adult. In a time where students feel less hopeful about their future because they are so overwhelmed by the challenges each day brings, why are we indirectly creating more barriers that they will have to overcome. It is easy to understand the correlation of how a lack of education can lead to a lack of opportunity, then it is quite obvious a lack of resources will lead to a lack of hope for our youth.

This is highly true of black and brown youth who face numerous systemic hurdles in order to just be alive and graduate high school in New York City. Every dollar removed or cut is a resource that is vital to our children's development. Budget cuts are people. These are people who are willing to stand in the gap and fill in for families because of varying mitigating factors that families/parents are not able to be all things to their children. We are all familiar, I hope, with the African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child", so why are we expecting our children to grow into adequate adults when we are not supplying the village with the resources necessary to assist them in raising our children.

The cuts that are being implemented and in discussion will only add to the frustration of the families and youth we currently serve in this city. The meals and stipends provided help students to eat dinner and earn financial independence. The funding helps offset burdens on families struggling financially because their child is able to earn a stipend or a gift card to access something they need or alleviate worry about lack of food for dinner because their child is able to eat at their after school programs. Students are not taught sex education curriculums in school as often in the past, if at all. It is through after school programming that students are able to learn about dating violence, mental health triggers, have access to caring adults, enjoy a safe environment to engage with their peers, and have fun while parents are doing what they need to as well without fear of their child's wellbeing.

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We as the elders in our society are able to recognize the challenges and barriers that our schools and communities are under in raising our youth in the village of New York State. Then I call upon you, our elected officials and representatives to resist the urge to remove funding and resources from our programs that are serving youth. Instead remain steadfast in investing in these programs and providing hope to the staff, who instill and provide hope to our most important resource in this country and state, our youth. Lack or education=lack of opportunity, lack of resources=lack of hope,

### Thank you for your time,

### Derwin Greene

Derwin Greene, MSW Bronx Theater After School Program Director (718) 884-0700 x184

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### Written Testimony of Teresa Baik Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS) **Before the** New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Regarding **Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025** March 22, 2024

Good morning Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS).

Since 1973, KCS, a 501(c)(3) organization, has been serving underrepresented populations with an emphasis on the Korean immigrant and broader AAPI communities. KCS is committed to ensuring individuals remain grounded in their heritage but develop the capacity to thrive in their daily lives. In response to the significant cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers immigrants face each day, KCS provides a comprehensive array of client-tailored services in the areas of Aging, Education, Immigration, Workforce Development, Public Health, and Mental Health. Our holistic services enable Asian American immigrants to navigate through any challenges that may arise in their journey towards becoming more dynamic, healthy, and confident members of society. KCS is also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCAAL).

For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city and state funding. Each year, the number of students that we serve has increased and the number of classes we now provide is evidence of the success for our ESOL program and the constant need for adult literacy programming in our communities. We operate our in-person classes from Monday - Friday with flexible class times in the morning and afternoon to best accommodate our students and their busy schedules.

As you know, DYCD currently has an open RFP that will fund community-based organizations to lead adult basic education, high school equivalency, and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs for the next three to six years. DYCD has structured this RFP to prioritize residents of the highest poverty, lowest educational attainment, most limited English proficient neighborhoods in the city. We wholeheartedly support this goal. However, the way

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DYCD has structured the RFP through a two-tier funding competition, allows many organizations, a staggering percentage of up to 70%, to ultimately be non-competitive. This is the grim reality that we are facing right now at KCS. By the time the new fiscal year comes around we will be forced to close our classes which will displace the hundreds of students that come to our center for ESOL classes. On a positive note, we are grateful to you, Council Member Stevens, Council Member Lee, as well as the 40 other council members who signed on to Council Member Won's letter urging DYCD to revise this counterproductive competition model and to extend the proposal deadline.

As a result, we are asking the council to continue putting pressure on DYCD to do a combination of the following:

1. Increase the per student funding rate, which would make it more realistic for smaller programs/organizations - those that don't have additional sources of revenue to supplement the DYCD funding – to apply under this RFP and to be able to provide more comprehensive services.

2. Increase the number of Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) designated for funding and increase the number of students served through this RFP.

3. Create a second, non-NTA based competition for providers who wish to run boroughwide and/or city-wide programs and increase the number of students served through this RFP.

We at KCS are extremely grateful that the City Council has continued to support our Adult Literacy classes throughout the years and want to draw specific attention to the Adult Literacy Pilot Program that the Council has so graciously funded these past few years. It has been a tremendous help to our programs and ultimately to our students.

In conclusion, with the April 5th deadline for organizations to submit proposals fast approaching, we urge this committee to get clarity on the funding and push for a baselining of the full \$21.7 million, as well as to continue to push to fix the competition model and extend the deadline further.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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### Presented before the New York City Council City Council's Committee on Children and Youth Oversight Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing March 22, 2024

Thank you to Chair Althea Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to testify at today's Preliminary Budget Hearing. I am Rob Saltares, New York City Program Officer at Laureus USA. I stand before you today as living proof of the profound impact of sport. I am the son of immigrant parents, who raised a boy in an East Harlem NYCHA development. Thanks to the long term support of a sport based youth development program (shout out to Harlem RBI) I was able to rise above my surrounding influences to avoid becoming part of the many statistics that outline the struggles of our most under-resourced communities.

Laureus USA is a grant-making, nonprofit organization that supports the growth and deepens the impact of programs that use sport for positive youth and community outcomes. Citywide, Laureus works with 60 direct service organizations that offer sports programming to youth. Collectively, these programs serve about 172,000 young people, with 86% of those young people served being from under-resourced communities.

We would like to thank Speaker Adams, Chair Stevens and members of the Council for their ongoing efforts to support youth.

### **Benefits of Youth Sports Programming**

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Through available research on the impact of youth sport participation, we know that:

- Sport cultivates the development of Social and Emotional skills that translate off the playing surface and into all facets of life.
- Sport decreases lifestyle health risk factors such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes
- Sport reduces rates of anxiety, depression, and stress levels, while improving cognitive function and self-esteem
- Additional long-term correlations include reduced substance abuse, lowered risky behaviors, and lowered risk of suicide.

These benefits spill over to real economic impacts as well. A recent peer review study in the



American Journal of Preventive Medicine - led in part by some great local researchers like Bruce Lee of CUNY and Meredith Whitley at Adelphi– found that meeting the nation's Healthy People 2030 youth sports participation goal could not only improve children's physical and mental health, but could save \$80 billion in reduced medical and mental health costs and productivity losses.

We acknowledge that not all sport experiences are positive, which is why support of organizations that intentionally program sport with positive youth outcomes in mind is vital to the future of our communities.

### Mentorship & Violence Prevention

The promise of sport based youth development approaches is anchored by relationship building which sets a foundation that allows for sport to be a preventative measure against community violence. Participation in SBYD programs, under the guidance of supportive adult mentorship, helps balance and regulate mood by improving focus and strengthening the mental fortitude necessary to block distracting "noise" that youth may experience in high-violence areas. Furthermore, having at least one adult mentor in the life of a young person can lead to improved academic performance, increased graduation rates, reduced dropout rates, and improved higher educational aspirations.

Additionally, many SBYD programs are delivered in out of school time settings when rates of violence among youth (ages 10-18) are likely to be the highest. In line with after-school programs, SBYD programs aim to create safe environments where youth can build and practice life skills that can help buffer against risks of violence, such as self-regulation, responsible decision-making, and social problem solving.

### Importance of Funding Youth Sports

As I have outlined, the acute importance of funding youth sport is inherently tied to the benefits they provide. We applaud the steps that city and state leaders have taken thus far to create dedicated funding pools specifically for youth development and sport programming. Currently, the New York State Office of Children and Families administers the Youth Team Sports and Youth Sports Education and Opportunity funding to counties to redistribute to local organizations. These resources help local organizations provide crucial sports programming to some of the most underserved youth.



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The city has also taken steps to fund youth sports programming. Earlier this month, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development released a request for proposal for the <u>Neighborhood Youth Team Sports</u> Grant. Additionally, the City Council prioritizes funding for sports for girls through the Sports Training and Role Models for Success Initiative.

As the City Council and the Administration work together to adopt the fiscal year 2025 budget, we would like to encourage the administration to identify opportunities to further enhance youth sports programming. Efforts can include collecting data to examine the short and long term benefits of providing New York City youth with sports programming and better identifying community districts where youth-centered sport programming is needed. It can also include ensuring that funding for sports are allocated to organizations in a timely manner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Please email me at robert.saltares@laureus.com with any questions regarding this testimony.

March 22, 2024 | Committee on Children & Youth Preliminary Budget Hearing | Adult Literacy Siobhan Loughran, *Digital Literacy & ESOL Instructor and Educational Case Manager* | Lehman College Adult Learning Center

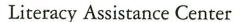
My colleagues and students have already written and spoken about the need our city has for more free English language instruction. I wish to briefly speak more specifically on the need for digital literacy education for adults. When I started working with adult students by teaching English, the disparity in digital skills was immediately apparent. As an educational case manager, I've worked one-on-one with students to navigate joining Zoom classes and connecting to resources online. As a digital literacy instructor for ESOL students, I've taught basic computer skills in a computer lab setting.

I'm still a young professional, so I grew up in the digital age. I attended a weekly computer class in my elementary school. I learned to type properly with a CD-ROM game on my family's home computer. Quite naturally and effortlessly over the years, I've become quite proficient in digital skills. I list these facts about my growth in digital abilities to outline two crucial elements that our adult students are missing: **explicit instruction** and **access to resources** – my in-school computer class and CD game, and my home computer with internet access.

In my current digital literacy class, we've repeatedly reviewed the Shift key. Why? The students struggled to simply log in to the computer because they couldn't keep track of turning on and off the Caps Lock while entering the password. You likely take for granted knowing the difference between the Shift and Caps Lock keys, or the difference between a left and right click on a mouse. Once upon a time, learning that difference took explicit instruction. Then, it took practice. A lot of practice. Maybe it was in school, the library, at home, or through professional development at work. We forget how we learned because it was incorporated into the demands of our daily lives.

But our adult education students see those demands as barriers – to jobs, to educational opportunities, to their child's future. When asked the first day of class, "Why are you here?", their answers were along the lines of, "It's everywhere. You go to the doctor and you have to check in with an iPad. We must learn computers just to exist in society." Our students at the ALC that aren't digitally proficient probably know how to use apps and complete a Google search on their smartphones, but they often don't know how to type; they don't know how to save, upload, or download a file; they can't organize their email inbox; and they don't know how to keep their personal information safe and secure online.

All of this digital know-how requires instruction from a teacher and hours and hours of practice – that practice is hard to come by when they don't have a laptop or Wi-Fi at home, or when they're too busy providing for their family to practice outside of class. These students need more funding to pay for the instructors and the class time that is sufficient enough to *actually* build their digital skills, so that they can be more successful community members, parents, and workers.



### New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair

### FY25 Preliminary Budget Hearing March 22, 2024

### Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 41-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL).

Today in New York City, there are over 2.2 million adults with limited English proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Last year, DYCD funding provided services to 16,000 of these adults, less than 1% of those in need.

As you know, DYCD currently has an open RFP that will fund community-based organizations to lead adult basic education, high school equivalency, and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs for the next three to six years. Yet at a time when the need for services in our communities is only expanding, this RFP cuts DYCD funding for adult literacy education by 30% -- from \$16.83 million in FY24 to \$11.85 million in FY25 through FY27. In addition, for this particular RFP, DYCD has created a funding model based on Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs), a model which could render up to 70% of the current community-based adult literacy providers non-competitive, forcing them to close their classes, displace thousands of students, and leave up to 12 city council districts without the DYCD-funded adult

literacy classes they currently have. Moreover, the decrease in funding will mean that only 9,100 students will be served annually, less than ½ of 1% of the 2.2 million adult New Yorkers in need.

*It doesn't need to be this way.* The Mayors Preliminary Budget for FY25 actually includes \$21.7 million for DYCD Adult Literacy, nearly \$10 million – or 85% - more than what is currently included in the RFP. If this additional funding could get baselined and included in the RFP, DYCD could do some combination of the following three things:

- Increase the per student funding rate, which would make it more realistic for smaller programs/organizations – those that don't have additional sources of revenue to supplement the DYCD funding – to apply under this RFP and to be able to provide more comprehensive services.
- Increase the number of Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) designated for funding and increase the number of students served through this RFP.
- Create a second, non-NTA based competition for providers who wish to run boroughwide and/or city-wide programs and increase the number of students served through this RFP.

With the April 5th deadline for organizations to submit proposals fast approaching, we urge this committee to get clarity on the funding, push for a baselining of the full \$21.7 million, and compel DYCD to work with advocates and the council to restructure this RFP to better serve our communities.

Thank you for your attention.

Ira Yankwitt Executive Director Literacy Assistance Center iray@lacnyc.org

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March 21, 2024 Committee on Children and Youth Hello Good Morning,

I am submitting this testimonial on Behalf of Moms on the move Childcare Coop.

My name is Lillian Cortes-Guzman I am the Media Representative for the Coop, I am a Provider in the South Bronx and have been such for over 20 years. I work with the Dept of Education 3k program and the United Federation of Teachers. I include all the above as a reference to my knowledge of the State of Childcare and Education in The South Bronx.

I will start with the first concern which addresses the Dept of Education not being able to support the 3k children who need services and already have their CPSC classification. We met with representatives from the DOE and they expressed a severe shortage of Therapist but what was most disturbing was the lack of Therapist willing to work in the Bronx. This means that Providers such as myself would not only be childcare providers but therapists as well to the best of our abilities without acknowledgement or compensation. The Agency for Child Development has seen the work that we do and has set aside a higher pay rate for providers working with children who have disabilities. While the market rate is still low under \$10.00 dollars an hour we are at least being acknowledged. I would like the DOE to follow these measures and compensate providers who are supporting our Special Needs Children.

Currently childcare providers in the Bronx are not being allowed to work with the 4k program, this is a major concern to parents who do not want their child in a larger setting because it can be overwhelming. Many providers are capable and willing to participate in the 4k program, Parents have expressed their frustration at having to move their children out of a safe, small, loving environment to a school setting. Parents should be allowed to choose what they feel confident and comfortable with for their children.

As a representative for the Coop I would like to mention that Providers have been revamping their daycares to meet DOE standards, they have been getting CDA certified and taking immense amount of trainings so they can be the best version of a child's first experience with Education. We have provided trainings and support to Providers. We need the City to continue to support Small Daycare settings so we in turn can support not only the future, but the workforce, our local economy and our community.

Thank you for your time.

Lillian Cortes-Guzman

# **New York City Council**

# **SAVE LEARNING TO WORK**

March 19, 2024

Testimony Presented By Michael De Vito Jr. Executive Director NYCID



Good Day Councilmembers:

I'm Michael DeVito from New York Center for Interpersonal Development. NYCID is a member just about all the coalitions giving testimony to this committee. Today, I write to you specifically about Learning to Work Program which is set to lose 72% of its funding on June 30, 2024. Effectively rendering the programs inoperable. This represents \$32M of a \$40 million dollar budget that supports the community-based partnerships. These funds have historically been supplied by City Tax Levy funds.

As someone working this long, I feel charged to ensure we state our history.

Over the years I have reported to this committee that the partnerships that CBOs like NYCID have with the city have saved the Big Apple BILLIONS.

Here's the figure that has been presented over the years to many committees: \$325,000 - that's the aggregated figure presented by Northeastern University and the Community Service Society,

"in lifetime budgetary terms, 'each individual without a high school diploma represents a net cost to New York City of \$134,037, whereas each New Yorker with a high school diploma or GED yields a net benefit of \$192,715 - a swing of more than \$325,000 per person." Thus, in the aggregate, simply helping one low-skilled New Yorker earn a high school degree or equivalency is worth more than \$325,000 to the city."<sup>2</sup>

In the last 20 years LTW Programs helped more than **15,000** New Yorkers obtain a high school diploma. That's \$4.9 **billion** dollars of net benefit for our city. Learning to Work has been delivered to New York City.

To understand where we are going, we must know where we have been. And where we have been before is face to face with a population size problem, an epidemic - a tragedy where the youth of New York City, your kids, my kids, our kids, were in need. Academically, emotionally, and economically in need.

Our kids needed guidance, support, mentoring, personal and professional development, remediation, and ways to self-regulate and become accountable for their actions for themselves, their families, our city, and our

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Community Service Society, <u>From Basic Skills to Better Futures: Generating Economic Dividends for</u> <u>New York City</u> at 9 (Sept. 2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>Id.</u> at 1.

nation. They needed a place to thrive, flourish, and belong. In 2004, the number of our kids who needed this help topped 180,000. They were in need - at risk, at promise!

LTW was the planned, strategic answer, bringing together community and government to begin solving the problem. It was also considered the most cost-effective solution.

Twenty years later - after a global pandemic where the rich got richer, and the poor got even further beaten down, we cannot even count the number of OUR KIDS who are in need. Many walk around unidentified and will continue until all the dust settles on the pictures taken over the last four years.

Amid this continued state of emergency, LTW is being viewed as a "NICE-TO-HAVE." Instead of a "MUST-HAVE." Somehow, it is not being prioritized with food and water.

We are NOT-A-NICE-TO-HAVE. We are an ABSOLUTELY-MUST NEED. Not funding LTW is saying we don't care about the most vulnerable - No matter how it is twisted, the fact that we are standing here again hat in hand screams inequity and wrong-doing. Not funding LTW is cutting off our noses despite the City's face. A face that we must save. It's not just missing the forest for the trees. It is not seeing the wild followers that need cultivation and love to be strong and ready.

All this has happened before. NYC had a whole in its guts before Alternative Pathways were developed. We didn't have an answer.

Indulge me now, and let's use our imagination to imagine a future without LTW. At some point, someone on your council will say we need to solve this problem, and they will find money for it. My money now would be on the fact that the answer then will be the answer we already have now -

Let's not KID our KIDS by lying to ourselves that we can live without this program. Let's not go backward.

Please find a way. Please find a way to save this program and those workers that give of themselves every day to help our KIDS.

Thank you.

New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

### Testimony before the Committee on Children and Youth **Preliminary Budget Hearing** March 22, 2024

**Presented by** Allison Hollihan, Director New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents



New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents A project of Osborne Association

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Allison Hollihan and I am the Director for the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP). Since 2006, Osborne Association has coordinated the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, a statewide partnership of over 60 government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and families who have experienced parental incarceration.

I am here on behalf of this partnership to highlight the need for City agencies to make policy and practice changes, and implement cross-system collaborations to better support the one in 14 children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent. Approximately one in five NYC DOE high school students and one in seven middle school students reported experiencing parental incarceration in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Due to the systemic racism inherent in the criminal legal system, children of color experience parental incarceration at higher rates: 1 in 9 Black children and 1 in 28 Hispanic children, compared to 1 in 57 white children.<sup>1</sup> Parental arrest and incarceration, and the associated harms to children's wellbeing, should be among the City's Commission on Racial Equity's priorities.

Parental incarceration is an "adverse childhood experience," one of ten childhood traumas that are linked to toxic stress, altered brain development, and long-term negative health and mental health outcomes. Children who experience the arrest and incarceration of a loved one are also more likely than other children to experience violence in their communities and at home.<sup>2</sup> It is imperative that the City takes steps to promote protective factors to support children's well-being and examine policies and practices through a race equity lens to address these disparate outcomes. Doing so requires cross-systems collaboration, data collection, and dedicated funding for supportive services.

In 2010, NYCIP coordinated the first-ever statewide summit examining the needs and experiences of New York State's children with incarcerated parents. The Summit led to the issuing of a <u>report</u> that provided recommendations for relevant government agencies (including law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and children-serving agencies). While some of the report's 87 recommendations have since been implemented, most remain relevant and needed today. In 2016, we issued another <u>report</u> for child welfare outlining recommendations needed within this field and, specifically, for children in foster care.<sup>3</sup> Today, I will highlight some of these key recommendations:

# 1. Funding for community-based organizations to provide tailored services to support children of arrested and incarcerated parents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts: Pew Center on the States. Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility. Washington, DC. 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In an analysis of the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health data, 20.3% of children of incarcerated parents experienced community violence, compared to 2.3% of children who had never experienced parental incarceration.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Additional information including the Summit report, child welfare report, and handbooks on serving children of incarcerated parents can be found on the Osborne website: <u>www.osborneny.org</u>

Osborne is grateful to have received City Council funding for the past three years to implement Administrative Code §14-181, which requires NYPD to safeguard children present during an arrest and provide families with information about community-based services to help children process the arrest of a parent. Through this funding, Osborne provides technical assistance and training for eleven community-based organizations that provide critical mental health services to NYC's children and families. They require dedicated City funding in order to provide tailored services and ongoing training for clinicians to meet the needs of children and families after a parent's arrest. Funding is also needed to expand the network of community-based services that is equipped to meet the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents and their families throughout the City. This should include, but not be limited to, dedicated funding for afterschool programs, Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers, Runaway and Homeless Youth services, Youth Workforce Development programs, Fatherhood programs, Family Support programs, Immigrant Services, and Youth Workforce Development programs, including the Summer Youth Employment program, to serve children of incarcerated parents.

## 2. Data collection on how many children experience the arrest or incarceration of a parent is needed to inform service delivery.

It is long past time to address the fact that we do not know how many children are present at a parent's arrest or experience the incarceration of a parent. Having this data would allow for cross-systems collaboration and coordination with criminal justice agencies, staff training, and tailoring best practices to this particular circumstance. Taking steps to identify and support these children promotes child and family wellbeing, setting children up for success *rather than costly involvement in* the mental health, homeless, and juvenile or criminal legal systems.

We applaud the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Department of Education for beginning to include parental incarceration in the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in 2017. This data tells us that one in four high school students residing in the Bronx, and 1 in 5 high school students residing in Brooklyn and Staten Island, have had an incarcerated parent during their childhood. It is vital that this question be included in future surveys to inform funding decisions, service needs, and to better equip professionals to address challenges students are facing that may contribute to disparate outcomes. However, even more robust, community-level data is needed.

Over the past three years, Osborne collaborated with the NYPD Office of Collaborative Policing to strengthen NYPD's data collection efforts. In response to Administrative Code §14-181, officers are now required to denote whether a child of an arrested parent "Requires Care/Shelter Due to Caregiver Arrest." While this is important for ensuring children have a caregiver in the absence of their parent, knowing the number of children present during a parent or caregiver's arrest and their ages would ensure adequate and targeted community-based resources are available. However, NYPD is not currently collecting these additional data points.

NYPD is not the only City agency that doesn't keep data on the number of children affected by the arrest or incarceration of a parent. It is particularly alarming that ACS, Family Court, and DYCD do not have data on how many children are affected by parental arrest or incarceration. Despite decades of providers and advocates calling for this, we still do not know how many children in foster care have an incarcerated parent, which could result in the foster care provider agency not meeting their legally mandated reasonable and diligent efforts. It is essential that provider agencies determine and document whether a parent is incarcerated, and if so, take steps to engage the parent, guided by what is in the child's best interest and the law that requires reasonable efforts, including in-person visits. Knowing that a parent is incarcerated allows for service providers to better support children's relationships with their parents, provide children with services to process this unique form of loss, and promote positive outcomes for children. Within child welfare, some policies do exist to uphold the rights and meet the needs of these children, but data collection mechanisms are needed to monitor compliance with existing policies and to track outcomes. Knowing how prevalent parental incarceration is in each neighborhood would allow for DYCD and other city agencies to effectively meet the needs of children and ensure community-based services are equipped to meet their unique needs. Without data, we are failing to meet the needs of children.

**3.** We recommend that ACS and its provider agencies take steps to better support children of arrested and incarcerated parents in preventive and foster care programs. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

► Strengthen the ability of automated, integrated information systems to capture and aggregate data about parental incarceration. Implement internal identification and tracking mechanisms.

▶ Note parental incarceration in family and child service plans.

► Monitor and document compliance with policies and practices regarding children of incarcerated parents in provider agency performance reviews and corrective action plans.

► Explore inter-agency data matching with Departments of Correction, Probation and Parole, and Family Court.

► Deliver ongoing staff training about practices that support children of incarcerated parents and an overview of the criminal legal system.

► Designate provider agency point persons who have expertise about working with incarcerated parents and navigating the criminal legal system.

4. Children of Incarcerated Parents should be considered as a priority population for the Summer Youth Employment Program.

National research and data collected by the NYC DOHMH<sup>4</sup> finds that parental incarceration is associated with lower school readiness, increased instability, poor mental health outcomes, and higher rates of tobacco and drug use. Families of the incarcerated are also more likely to experience poverty, with nearly 65% of families with an incarcerated member unable to meet their family's basic needs.<sup>5</sup> Ensuring that children of incarcerated parents are prioritized for SYEP will mean they have opportunities to build their career readiness skills and earn income to meet their basic needs.

5. The Interagency Coordinating Council on Youth (ICC) should implement a children of incarcerated parents working group to improve the effectiveness of all youth serving agencies to meet the unique needs of children of arrested and incarcerated parents.

It is distressing that City agencies are not aware of the tens of thousands of children who are feeling isolated, alone, and stigmatized because of their parent's arrest or incarceration; distressing that many children who want to visit their parents cannot do so due to lack of resources and lack of programs to bring them to visits; it is distressing that child-serving staff are not trained to meet these children's unique needs, nor can they competently answer families' questions about the criminal legal system; and it is distressing that we continue to have visiting policies and practices at City jails that are traumatizing to children.

It is imperative that the needs and experiences of children of incarcerated parents are considered and recognized by every City agency that serves children and families, and those that arrest, detain, prosecute, sentence, and supervise parents. Too often, these children are not considered during policy development or program design and implementation, and the workforce is ill-equipped to meet their needs. This working group should inventory City agencies' existing policies and practices, and revise or create policies to safeguard children consistent with the *Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights*. The working group should explore how best to equip the workforce with language and strategies for creating affirming spaces that make families comfortable to disclose that they are navigating a parent's involvement in the criminal legal system from the point of a parent's arrest through reentry. NYCIP welcomes the opportunity to present on this issue at an upcoming ICC meeting.

Please note that the New York Initiative on Children of Incarcerated Parents has quarterly Partner meetings. The next virtual meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, from 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm. We welcome Councilmembers or your staff to attend. Please contact me at <u>ahollihan@osborneny.org</u> for details.

Thank you.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Khan S, Baquero M, Davila, M. Parental Incarceration and Well-Being among Adolescents in New York City Public High Schools. NYC Vital Signs, 2021, 19(3); 1-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015.

### The Osborne Association New York City Council FY25 Discretionary Funding Requests

Program	Description	FY25 Request	FY24 Funding
Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Services	Osborne's portion of the ATI coalition request, which will support multiple programs: (1) court advocacy and mitigation services; (2) video visiting and family strengthening activities; (3) expansion of job training and placement; (4) elder reentry services; and (5) the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations.	\$1,952,074	\$1,852,074
Rikers Island: Partial Program Restoration- Supportive Services at George R. Vierno Center (GRVC)	To relaunch critical rehabilitative services for people who are detained at the GRVC on Rikers Island. Osborne will restore daily group services for up to 18 housing areas, serving approximately 360 people per week.	\$500,000	N/A
Bronx-Osborne Gun Accountability Project (BOGAP)	For expanding BOGAP—an innovative diversion program developed with the Bronx DA—to serve approximately 75 participants annually. Funds will be used to provide hot meals to program participants, stipends for internships, and additional support services to participants to increase their chances of success in the program.	\$20,000	\$20,000
Elder Reentry Initiative Services and Advocacy	To support two related program areas: (1) The Elder Reentry Initiative's participant screening, intake and assessment, reentry service plans, community case management, and technical assistance; and (2) Osborne's advocacy and public education on behalf of older adults.	\$100,000	\$90,000

## The Osborne Association New York City Council FY25 Discretionary Funding Requests

The Fulton Community Reentry Center	For Osborne's new transitional reentry housing facility. Funding will support workforce development training for Fulton residents; group sessions for residents and community members (e.g., AA meetings); restorative justice community-building circles for residents and community members; and a therapeutic gardening program.	\$250,000	\$10,000
Health and Wellness – Ending the Epidemic	To support formerly incarcerated people who are living with or at high risk of contracting HIV and come from low-income communities of color, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ people. Osborne will provide sexual health education, prevention/treatment, trauma support, and other supportive services.	\$60,219	\$60,219
Hep Free NYC	To support a new, full-time staff position of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C Patient Navigator—who will serve formerly incarcerated people and others with criminal legal system involvement from Osborne's offices in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx.	\$125,000	N/A
Implementation of the NYC Safeguarding Children Initiative	To support implementation of Local Law 1349-A, enacted to reduce trauma to children when NYPD arrests the parent of a child. Osborne will provide necessary training and administrative support to the NYPD, and build a network of CBOs that can provide post-arrest support to children.	\$265,000	\$265,000
Improving Behavioral Health and Wellbeing for Youth	For assessing and addressing mental health and trauma in youth impacted by the criminal legal system through treatment options that alleviate stress, improve functioning, and reduce trauma symptoms. Targets: 60 assessments; 120 referrals.	\$158,000	\$158,000

# **New York Initiative for** Children of Incarcerated **Parents** (NYCIP)

a project of Osborne Association

NYCIP raises awareness, promotes policies and practices, and builds partnerships to ensure that children's rights are upheld, relationships supported, and their potential nurtured during their parent's involvement in the criminal legal system.

Launched by Osborne Association in 2006, NYCIP is a partnership of over 50 organizations and government agencies, people with lived experience, and the faithbased community who collaborate to turn the Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of <u>Rights</u> into a reality.







Visit SUSU to connect with resources



An estimated 1 in 14 children ]-IN-]**/** in the U.S. have experienced parental CHILDREN incarceration. That's over 5 million children nationwide.

1-IN-9 **BLACK CHILDREN** 

1-IN-28 **HISPANIC CHILDREN** 

1-IN-57 WHITE CHILDREN

**EXPERIENCE PARENTAL INCARCERATION ON** ANY GIVEN DAY DUE TO RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM.

## **CHILDREN NEED TO BE** SEEN AND SUPPORTED

- · Separation due to incarceration is a complex loss due to ambiguity and stigma.
- Parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience.
- · Children are more likely to experience homelessness, negative health and behavioral outcomes, and academic challenges.
- Tailored support, strong adult relationships, and peer support promote children's well-being.
- · Most children want and benefit from a relationship with their incarcerated parent.

## OUR APPROACH

Center the experiences and solutions of those with lived experience.

Apply a child-centered, trauma-informed, and racial equity lens. Collaborate with systems to shift practice. Seek legislative solutions as needed.

<u>Use language</u> that recognizes our shared humanity and reduces stigma.

Say "incarcerated parents" or "people involved in the criminal legal system."

### PRINCIPLES

- Children should be considered from the moment of a parent's arrest through reentry.
- Children should have access to their parents through visits, video, calls, mail and packages.
- Children thrive despite challenges when their unique needs are met.
- Children should be free of stigma related to their parents' incarceration.
- We aim to dismantle policies and practices that perpetuate systemic racism.
- We speak about breaking cycles of intergenerational racism, trauma, and poverty, rather than breaking cycles of intergenerational incarceration, which places blame on families.

### **KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

2010	First-ever statewide Summit on	
2010	Children of Incarcerated Parents.	
2011	Released <u>A Call to Action:</u> <u>Safeguarding New York's</u> <u>Children of Incarcerated Parents</u> .	
2014	<b>Ashley's Law</b> requires NYS DOCCS to post visiting rules for all facilities on their website.	
	NYS Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives highlights Family Responsibility Statements as a best practice.	
2015	Launched <b>See Us, Support Us</b> (SUSU) to raise awareness about children of incarcerated parents.	
2017	Daily visiting hours at maximum- security NYS prisons are maintained.	
2018	Created resources for ACS on how to include incarcerated parents in case planning and support children's relationships with their parents.	
2019	NYC law directs NYPD to adopt a policy to safeguard children of arrested parents and train personnel.	
2020	Law directs the NYS Department of Corrections to place parents in facilities closer to their minor children. 3,500 parents were transferred as of 2023.	
2023	Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents/Guardians becomes a Law Enforcement Accreditation Standard in NY.	

To learn more or to get involved, email the New York Initiative at **NYInitiative@osborneny.org** and sign up for the **See Us, Support Us Network** newsletter.



/NYCIP



# NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)

TESTIMONY

Regarding

General Funding Support

PRESENTED BEFORE:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL Committee on Children and Youth March 22, 2024

PRESENTED BY:

Katje King

Director of Education & Career Services

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979 which has grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 120 employees, serving all of New York City. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. We serve about 14,000 clients each year with a variety of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Education/Career, Finance/Benefits, Health, and Holistic needs. Our education and career services provide over 500 members of the community with the basic building blocks - access to preparation for the High School Equivalency exam, English language skills, and the associated wrap around services - necessary to establish secure and prosperous futures.

NMIC does not charge any fees for services to our primarily low-income communities and immigrant persons and families. NMIC is ideally situated in Washington Heights and University Heights where the large immigrant and mostly Spanish speaking populations in these communities can easily access the broad range of services available.

Our core catchment area is Upper Manhattan (Community Districts 9-12) and adjacent Bronx neighborhoods (Community Districts 1-7). Our communities specifically represent some of the highest socioeconomic need in New York City and include 9 of the top 10 (out of 59 total) community districts with the highest percentage of residents living below the federal poverty level. These community districts report dropout rates far above the City average; with the Bronx districts we serve reporting over 12% of young people have left school, more than double the Citywide average of 5.9%.

The clients we serve are nearly 100% low income, 70% are foreign born, and 58% speak Spanish as their primary language. As low-income immigrants, many are faced with multiple barriers to success that can interact and compound upon one another, making single focus programs ineffective. That's why the provision of wraparound services and quality case management is a focus of all NMIC programs. Our goal is to step in and address both short- and long-term needs that will enable our community to thrive.

NMIC is one of only a handful of settlement houses to provide a wide array of services onsite. As such we are uniquely positioned to provide clients with both literacy and educational programming, as well as the advocacy and case management support required for their success.

We have made great strides in 2023 and your support will allow us to continue to provide these existing services to our community members:

- NMIC provided adult education and career services to 547 individuals
- 164 individuals received workforce certifications and 110 received job placements
- 229 adults received English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction in FY23
- 90 adults received Adult Basic Education and High School Equivalency instruction in FY23

- Approximately 60% of NMIC Adult Education Program participants are referred to additional services, including mental health, benefits access, housing, or employment support
- NMIC enrolled 238 children through Promise NYC (125 in the Bronx and 113 in Manhattan), the maximum allowable amount under our contract

These numbers represent only a portion of the work we are doing throughout the City, progress that is dependent on consistent funding. Organizations like NMIC operate under City contracts established with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Services (DYCD). After years of operation under contracts negotiated prior to the pandemic, DYCD has recently released an RFP for literacy service providers. Unfortunately, the funding and staffing levels outlined in the new RFP do not reflect a meaningful change from the existing funding or staffing structure. These contracts do not require or fund staffing at a ratio that meets the complex needs of NMIC's clients. There is no dedicated funding or staffing to promote and maintain instructional quality and the contract only requires one part-time case manager to support over 100 clients annually.

To make up for the funding gaps inherent in the DYCD RFP, organizations like NMIC rely just as heavily on discretionary awards and similar city contracts to meet the needs of our community. With critical support from the City Council for the Adult Literacy Pilot Project, NMIC can offer enhanced case management services and improved instruction to clients in our ESOL, ABE, and HSE educational programs. This funding is essential to the success of our Adult Education Team, empowering NMIC to adequately staff a high-quality Adult Education program where instructors, staff, and clients have access to the resources they need to support meaningful learning.

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With funds from the Adult Literacy Pilot Project, NMIC has hired a part time Instructional Coach to deliver professional development activities and coaching to NMIC's team of eight instructors. The Instructional Coach is focused on helping instructors incorporate culturally inclusive practices into their classrooms and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners. This funding also supplements that received through NMIC's existing Adult Literacy contracts, enabling NMIC to hire enough case managers to adequately meet our clients' needs. Clients regularly arrive at NMIC struggling with trauma, mental health issues, and on-going economic concerns. They require referrals for wrap-around services and follow-up to ensure those services are received. Without this support, clients do not persist or make meaningful gains towards their educational goals.

Promise NYC, a childcare assistance pilot program through ACS, is another vital service for low-income, immigrant families who are otherwise ineligible for federally subsidized childcare. Covering Manhattan and the Bronx, NMIC is working with families to connect them to childcare options for undocumented children at no cost. Recognizing that access to childcare is a burden disproportionately carried by low-income families, we are utilizing our community presence and large network to expand outreach under this program. Our hope is to broaden access to these necessary services for undocumented families in need.

Similarly, the generous support of the City Council is crucial to the continued operation of NMIC's YouthBuild program. YouthBuild is a high school equivalency and vocational training program, that supports young people who are interested in careers in technology and 21<sup>st</sup> Century business skills. This program helps up to 30 students pe year earn their high school diploma and earn certifications that position them for success in the workforce. NMIC is grateful for the support provided by the City Council for this invaluable initiative and looks forward to continuing this partnership.

To support our ongoing work NMIC requests a renewal in FY25 of our FY24 \$140,000 allocation for the Adult Literacy Pilot Project, renewal of our \$350,000 allocation under the YouthBuild program, and renewal of our funding for Promise NYC, and the Council's support to continue to advocate for increases to the baseline and reimbursement rates for contracts with DYCD. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY25 includes \$21.7 million for DYCD Adult Literacy, nearly \$10 million – nearly 85% – more than what is currently included in the RFP.

As structured, these contracts do not sufficiently fund the increased wrap around services and case management required to successfully enroll clients and ensure they persist in education and literacy classes. Further they do not provide additional funding after the first year to account for inflation and cost of living adjustments. If this additional funding could be baselined and included in the RFP, providers would be positioned to hire additional full-time staff to perform essential program functions. With the April 5th deadline for organizations to submit proposals fast approaching, we urge this Committee to get clarity on the funding and push for a baseline of the full \$21.7 million.

Your support for our work will send a strong message to communities across the City, showing that their rights are valued, and can make a huge difference in the lives of our community members. To meet current and future challenges facing New Yorkers, NMIC and other agencies require a reliable baseline of funding to develop a secure infrastructure of support. This can only happen with the council's commitment to make financial investments in our communities and the legal/social services sector.

Thank you again for your time and support. We look forward to continuing partnering with the City Council to ensure that our communities are welcomed and supported!



Testimony of NY Sun Works Public Hearing: NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth 22 March 2024

Thank you, NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to provide testimony - and for your past and ongoing support for public school students in NYC.

My name is Megan Nordgrén and I am the Director of Development and Government Relations with NY Sun Works, a non-profit organization that builds innovative science labs in schools. In our **Hydroponic Classrooms**, we use hydroponic technology to educate students and teachers about the science of sustainability and bring quality STEM education through the lens of urban farming. We envision a generation of environmental innovators, empowered to create solutions to global climate challenges.

We transform any New York City classroom - in any NYC public school - into a hydroponic lab. This is a cost-effective solution, giving students the opportunity to learn critical sustainability science and climate topics while they grow nutritious food right in the classroom year-round using state-of-the-art technology. Most of these labs have been built with capital funding from the city budget. Our program is integrated directly into the school day programming so teachers don't feel the

www.nysunworks.org

burden of additional programming requests; it instead augments and strengthens their science instruction. The NY Sun Works program gives access to high quality science education, in a way that is relevant to the moment.

We start in elementary schools with a year-round hands-on science and nutrition curriculum and continue through 12th grade with Regents-required lab curriculum. We are working to build a geographic pipeline of schools so that students may continue to learn science through hydroponic farming through all 12 years of grade school. We recently added new partnerships with LaGuardia Community College and Kingsborough Community College, extending the program to post-secondary learning, and have created a workforce development program for our high school students.

We are currently working with just over 300 K-12th grade schools in NYC, and we have more than 100 additional schools that are seeking funding to build a Hydroponic Classroom next year - in FY25. We have a goal of bringing our program to every student in NYC, and we request your support in opening new hydroponic labs at schools in NYC through capital funding, at \$175,000 per school, in FY25.

With the budget cuts schools are facing in FY25, we urge you to support NY Sun Works' cost effective quality science and climate programming in our current NYC schools through Expense Funding. For \$10,000 per school, NY Sun Works purchases all necessary science and grow supplies for the Hydroponic Classroom, provides weekly site visits to maintain the labs and provides ongoing mentoring to our partner teachers, and professional learning opportunities throughout the school

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year. We are respectfully requesting \$1,730,000 in Expense Funding to support our program in 173 of our most in-need schools (A Greener NYC, CASA, Local, Ant-Poverty, Youth, Speaker's Initiative).

We urge you to invest in STEM education through the lens of urban farming for our children attending public schools throughout the 5 boroughs - to bring equity in science, sustainability and climate education and to help bridge the GREEN Divide, particularly for communities of color. Thank you for your consideration.

Megan Nordgern, megan@nysunworks.org, 212-757-7560



Students in their hydroponic lab at Energy Tech High School

www.nysunworks.org



New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault

#### Testimony of Ponny White, Senior Prevention Coordinator New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault

#### Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 March 22, 2024

I would like to thank the chair, Council Member Stevens, and each member of this committee for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Ponny White. I work as the senior prevention coordinator for the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. I am here today to talk with you about the critical importance of sexual violence prevention for young people in New York City and to ask for \$125,000 in support for our Project DOT youth empowerment program through the Young Women's Initiative.

For over twenty years, the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault has worked to prevent sexual violence and reduce the harm it causes through education, research, and advocacy. We lead impactful sexual violence prevention programs and are a prominent provider of training and technical assistance to organizations and professionals who support survivors.

Sexual violence prevention programming that focuses on teenage girls is essential considering escalating violence experienced by youth, which has dramatically risen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s *Youth Risk Behavior Survey: 2011-2021* confirmed that the rate of sexual violence experienced by girls has been growing and is at a pace far outstripping the violence experienced by boys.<sup>1</sup> According to this study, 14% of high school-aged girls report having been physically forced at some point to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to (compared with 4% of boys), and, in 2021 alone, 18% of American girls experienced sexual violence (compared with 5% of boys). Importantly, the rates of girls experiencing sexual assault and sexual violence of any form have been rising, as noted in the 2011 to 2021 period. The trends for sexual violence are moving in the wrong direction; evidence-informed, proven sexual violence prevention initiatives focused on the needs of girls are urgently required.

To address this need, the Alliance launched Project DOT in 2014 to focus on sexual violence in a way that leverages community strength and prioritizes young girls' leadership development. DOT was designed together with youth collaborators, community-based organizations (CBOs) as well as sexual violence prevention experts, to focus on social norm change, healthy relationships, practicing consent, safe bystander engagement techniques and leadership skills.

We work together with several youth-serving community-based organizations and schools to broaden the reach of DOT to a diversity of young women of color and LGBTQIA youth. For example, the Alliance together with the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC), recently

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [2011-2021] Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

launched a new partnership with Bronx Theatre High School to bring Project DOT programming to their LGBTQ-identified students. DOT participants in that cohort are students between the ages of 14-18 years; 100% of which are LGBTQIA- identified. This is a school with an enrollment that is 60% Latino, 34% Black, 2% White; 90% of the student body come from economically disadvantaged homes, and 28% of the students live with a disability.

When we asked youth from a Project DOT cohort about the effect that the program had on them, one young woman talked about the day her group learned about emotional abuse.

"That impacted me a lot because I guess I experienced that firsthand. So, hearing that lesson – a switch kind of flipped in my head: 'Oh! This person was emotionally abusing me!' I guess he is considered an abuser in a way. I went through so much. It made me more aware. Now I know what to look out for, so I don't go through stuff like that again. I actually went home, and I analyzed my entire life that day. But it wasn't in a bad way. It was more so like...it just made me more aware of my surroundings and the people I let into my life."

Project DOT runs after school and in the summertime over 8-10-week periods. Nearing the end of the series, and after the group has built up trust between its members, the young women will make presentations for each other about the sexual violence-related topics that they have learned about. For most, this is the first time they have been asked to speak in front of a group about a sensitive subject. Tackling this challenge is an important part of their leader-ship development. As a DOT facilitator, I witnessed the impactful presentation of a particular young women during a recent DOT presentation day. This 17-year-old girl, who had immigrated to the U.S. from an African country, felt safe and supported by her cohort to make a presentation about a subject that was personal to her and relevant to her culture: female genital mutilation. Though this topic is not a part of the DOT curriculum, her presentation focused on something that 20 million women around the world face. And her lesson opened the eyes of her cohort to a form of abuse most had never heard of. Working with youth, I know that young people have a fear of how people look at them. They can be hesitant to do anything that might single them out. For this young lady to speak about something that most people in the U.S. are unaware of showed real leadership.

After presenting to each other, participants conclude their DOT series by leading community activities and a public awareness campaign. Past cohorts of youth have launched radio shows, community teach-ins for adult caregivers, and focus groups with parents to foster opportunities for intergenerational dialogue on healthy relationship and dating practices. This extends the impact of the program beyond the youth participants and positions them as leaders in their communities.

To prevent sexual violence across New York City, it is essential that we train and empower youth. Our Project DOT is a proven program that changes young women's lives and initiates ripples of impact throughout their communities.

We are asking for the Council's continued support through the Young Women's Initiative grant of \$125,000 to support this transformational work to prevent sexual violence from reaching New York City's young people.

The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault works citywide on several initiatives to combat the effect of this form of violence on our city. Please support our funding request of

\$500,000 through the Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault that allows us to run our Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Training Institute, and our funding request of \$300,000 for a new initiative to support our OutSmart collaboration with CVTC of sexual violence prevention in nightlife spaces (i.e. bars, restaurants, clubs).

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I thank you for your time and attention and welcome your questions.

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Testimony: Youth Services Committee 3.22.2024 Contact: Ponny@svfreenyc.org



Written Testimony of the NYC Family Policy Project To the NYC City Council Committee on Children and Families

March 22, 2024

This testimony is submitted by Nora McCarthy, director of the NYC Family Policy Project, a think tank whose mission is to build evidence through research, data and policy analysis to support reversing NYC's over-spending on policing families and under-investment in family life. FPP takes as its starting place the policy visions articulated by parents and youth impacted by the child welfare system, which argue for a curtailed child welfare system and expansive city investment in families. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and share information with the committee.

NYC Family Policy Project's testimony today regards our report, No Filter, published March 5, about the New York State Central Register (SCR), which receives hotline calls alleging child maltreatment and decides whether they meet the criteria under state law to be investigated.

Our report found that New York state screens out far fewer hotline calls than almost every other state. New York is rejecting only 25% of calls, while the national average is 50%. That suggests that thousands of NYC children and families are experiencing unwarranted investigations because the state is not using its screen-out authority on par with other states.

While the power to hold the state agency accountable lies with the state legislature—and an Assembly hearing is expected this fall—there are steps that the City Council and this committee can take to better protect NYC children from unwarranted investigations and their impacts. This testimony provides an overview of the report as well as suggestions for how this committee can contribute to holding the city Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and other city actors accountable to contribute to needed policy and practice change to reduce the scope and harm of investigations in NYC.

#### No Filter: SCR Report Summary

In recent years, <u>parent-led activism</u> and <u>new research</u> have documented the <u>harmful</u> <u>effects</u> and <u>enormous scope</u> of child welfare investigations, with <u>1 in 10 children</u> in many of NYC's Black and Latino neighborhoods experiencing a knock on the door in a single year.

Parents have spoken of "doorbell trauma" – mothers having panic attacks, their kids stripping off clothes to be inspected – when they hear their buzzer. At a recent meeting of Brownsville families, one parent described Administration for Children's Services (ACS) involvement in her

family and neighborhood as "like someone is on fire and screaming and no one is able to help them." Another said, about fighting off malicious calls, "My whole life changed."

In response to advocate demands to end surveillance and policing of Black and Latino families, city and state officials have begun to take steps to reduce hotline calls and investigations, focusing on training for mandated reporters and legislative reforms.

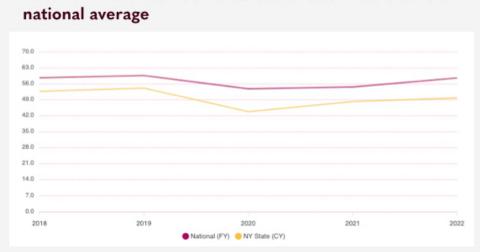
Missing from the conversation has been the role of the State Central Register (SCR), run by the state Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), which determines whether allegations of neglect or abuse called into the state hotline require an investigation or should be "screened out."

Nationwide, half of hotline calls alleging maltreatment are screened out. In addition to protecting families from unwarranted state intrusion, screen-outs enable investigators to focus their attention on children who are actually in danger. In New York, however, previously unreleased OCFS data obtained by the NYC Family Policy Project (FPP) shows that the state filters out far fewer hotline calls than most states, contributing to the state's high investigation rate.

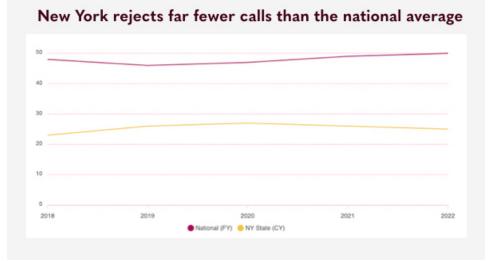
Specifically, data from 2018-2022 shows that New York's SCR:

- Rejected only about 25% of calls alleging maltreatment—far lower than the national average of 50%.
- Received calls at a lower rate than typical nationwide, but passed along reports at a • higher rate, resulting in an investigation rate above the national average.

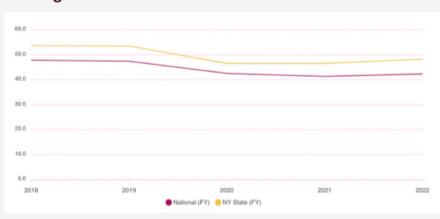
Even as pressure has grown for child welfare officials to reduce family surveillance, the percentage of calls accepted by the SCR remained largely stagnant over these five years, suggesting that OCFS's efforts to change the behavior of mandated reporters has not been matched by an effort to train and support practice



## New York receives hotline calls at a lower rate than the



New York has a higher rate of screened-in hotline calls than the national average



## New York has a higher investigation rate than the national average

Until now, it had not been possible to understand how New York compares to other states in how often it filters out calls. New York is one of only six states that reports no "screened-out" hotline calls to the federal data system, National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).<sup>[6]</sup> Each year 2018-2022, OCFS reported to NCANDS that "New York State does not collect information about calls not registered as reports" and, in communication to the federal Children's Bureau, which maintains NCANDS, has said that there is "no existing mechanism currently" to separate calls that allege abuse and neglect but are not accepted as a report from other types of calls to the SCR, such as those seeking information, which don't contain allegations.

However, OCFS data obtained through a freedom of information law (FOIL) request shows that the state does reject approximately 50,000 calls annually; tracks "information and referral" calls separately from those alleging maltreatment; and has kept data on these calls at least since 2018. It also shows that what OCFS calls "rejected reports" or "non-reports" are substantially identical to what other states report to NCANDS as "screened-out" calls.

The data gathered in this report—including evidence that recent SCR practice adjustments do seem to have reduced some reports—strongly suggest that the SCR can potentially function as a much greater defense against investigations that are not justified under state law. They also suggest that changing SCR processes and outcomes will require heightened transparency and oversight.

Currently, the SCR is operating with little public accounting of its processes or outcomes. OCFS has long maintained that it does not collect data on calls that are filtered out, even though it does, and it has provided almost no public data or information on its processes. That requires scrutiny. As urgency builds to strengthen guardrails to limit an experience that parents describe as "humiliating" and "traumatizing" to themselves and their children, much more information about the SCR's training, practices and outcomes should become part of the public record and be used to develop practice changes and support accountability.

An ideal ecosystem of change would include alignment and accountability across multiple levers: rising public consciousness of the impact of hotline calls and the legal standards for making them; enhanced training and consultation options for mandated reporters; legislative change to reduce pressure to report and to narrow opportunities for making false or unnecessary reports; and an assertive SCR screen-out role to ensure that it is filtering out every call that does not meet the legal standard.

Announcing its <u>new training for mandated reporters</u> last February, former OCFS Deputy Commissioner Lisa Ghartey Ogundimu said that messaging to mandated reporters to call the SCR whenever in doubt "has resulted in a staggering increase of abuse and maltreatment reports that not only are unwarranted in the first place, but in many cases were based solely on race and poverty. Black and Latinx populations have suffered for decades due to being disproportionately targeted by the child welfare system under these guidelines." It is important that OCFS provide greater clarity on how it has sought to rigorously apply its own power under the law to filter out these unwarranted reports change with its own staff.

#### <u>Steps that City Council and This Committee Can Take to Protect NYC Children from</u> <u>Unwarranted Investigations and Their Impacts</u>

First, this Committee can ask ACS to describe cases it is seeing where a report should not have been registered for investigation – and seek to understand the steps ACS has taken to close those cases quickly to reduce harm to the family. For example, CARES cases often can be closed after the 7-day assessment – but 80% of these cases stay open for 40-60 days. The Council can seek data and ask questions about how ACS is using –or not using—its power to quickly close unwarranted cases.

Second, the Committee can ask ACS about steps it is taking to assess malicious reports and to refer them for prosecution. Again, ACS does not have to complete every intrusive step in a full investigative protocol – such as entering the home, asking for health, mental health and school records, and talking with neighbors, teachers and doctors. The Council can seek to learn more about how ACS is responding to probable malicious reports and taking steps to reduce the impact on children and families.

Lastly, through joint hearings, you can seek information about the steps that NYC agencies and human service providers, such as shelters, are taking to reduce unwarranted hotline calls.

NYC Family Policy Project has been working on a study of organizations that have strong practices to support families directly in a crisis. These organizations provide additional training to staff to understand the law. They strongly encourage staff to discuss a possible report with an experienced supervisor. They have cash support available for families, and connections to community resources. And they spend a lot of staff time with parents. Through joint hearings, this committee can seek information high-calling agencies, such as the school system and shelter system, and hold them accountable for taking steps to directly support families instead of reporting them.

What we know about investigations is that they narrow parents' social networks and lead parents to fear seeking help, which can often make children less safe. We also know that in Black and Latino communities, investigations are extraordinarily common. In 50 city zip codes, 1 in 10 Black children was investigated just in 2019. In Brownsville, it was 1 in 5.

This committee can hold ACS accountable for its practices during investigations, and can seek to address overreporting by other city agencies and contracted providers.





QUEENS

PUBLIC

LIBRARY

#### NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH FISCAL YEAR 2025 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING March 22, 2024

The three library systems of New York City, Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library (serving the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island), and Queens Public Library, are grateful to the New York City Council for their ongoing support of City's First Readers. We would like to thank Speaker Adams, Committee Chair Stevens, and the committee members for their support and for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) Preliminary Budget.

Due to the generous support of the Council through the City's First Readers initiative, NYC libraries have been able to expand services and innovate new programs in support of young children, parents, caregivers, and early educators since 2014. Attendance at NYC library programs for young children surpassed 650,000 last year, and we are on track to build upon this milestone this year. Here are highlights of the work each library system engages in with City's First Readers resources:

- **Brooklyn Public Library** (BPL) offers in-person early literacy programs in 10 languages, including Ready, Set, Kindergarten, a school readiness storytime. This year we added Books Unbanned Storytimes to our roster of programs, highlighting the freedom to read for all ages and highlighting diverse picture books that have been challenged and banned across the United States.
- New York Public Library (NYPL) distributed 12,000 English/Spanish/Chinese early literacy outreach kits, nearly doubled a multilingual and multicultural "Little Learner" series across all 3 boroughs, increased early childhood outreach efforts into pediatric clinics and community health sites, and offered robust staff professional development.
- Queens Public Library (QPL) reached families and adult caregivers through in-person and virtual programming in 9 languages, provided early learning take-home kits, expanded Kickoff to Kindergarten and Toddler Learning Center programs which promote early literacy and parenting skills, and offered professional development to early learning staff.

City's First Readers has also allowed libraries to collaborate with initiative partners in unique ways. **Literacy Inc.** teams up with libraries to provide storytimes in low-resourced neighborhoods, **Reach Out and Read** and NYPL created literacy-rich waiting areas in pediatric



clinics, **JCCA** and BPL offer library cards and storytimes to foster families, and **La Fuerza de Familias Latinas** and QPL offer workshops for Spanish-speaking families on early intervention services.

We are proud of all we have accomplished through City's First Readers, including serving nearly 1 million families and distributing over half a million free books and early literacy kits in the past fiscal year. We are deeply appreciative of the Council's and Mayor's support, but there is more work to do in addressing learning loss due to the pandemic.

We urge the City Council to reauthorize funding for Fiscal Year 2025 for the City's First Readers Initiative, so this vitally important work can continue to grow and expand in NYC's libraries and beyond. Unfortunately, our work is compromised by mid-year cuts from the Administration which have resulted in significant impacts to libraries, including the loss of seven-day library service. Without the reversal of this cut, as well as the reauthorization of one-time funding from the Administration and the Council, libraries stand to lose \$58.3 million entering into FY25. A cut of this magnitude further impacts the number of days and hours our branches can be open to provide service to the public, and jeopardizes the reopening of newly-renovated branches in high-needs communities nearing completion. We implore the Council to help us serve those who need us most, by rejecting cuts to libraries and continuing to support City's First Readers.

Our libraries are the first social and educational experience many young families have, and we want it to be truly literacy rich. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.





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anned Parenthood of Greater New York

### Fiscal Year 2025 Expense Request Testimony NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 22nd, 2024

Good morning. My name is Maryam Mohammed-Miller, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth, Council Member Althea Stevens, and all the committee members for the opportunity to discuss PPGNY's programs, services, and fiscal year 2025 funding requests. I would also like to thank the Chair of the Finance Committee, Council Member Brannan, and Speaker Adrienne Adams for your continued support of PPGNY's work to provide health care access to all New Yorkers in need.

For over 100 years, Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2023, our New York City health centers conducted almost 70,000 patient visits, providing care to all those in need regardless of immigration status, identity, or ability to pay for services. This includes individuals forced to travel to NYC from states who have restricted access to sexual and reproductive and gender affirming care. We engaged over 23,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 9,000 young people. Our Project Street Beat program (PSB), through their offices and Mobile Health Center, conducted 422 Mobile Health Center visits and almost 300 service encounters with individuals at high risk of HIV exposure. And in 2023, we enrolled over 3,800 individuals in health insurance programs.

At PPGNY, we continue to provide care while facing the impact of the many attempts to severely restrict abortion care throughout the country. Just this year, anti-abortion groups have manipulated the court system to ban access to medication abortion and launch a baseless suit aimed at "defunding" Planned Parenthood. With the current configuration of the federal court system, we will likely see actions leading to millions of Americans, including those in an access state like New York, having their right to care stripped away. These attacks follow the United States Supreme Court (SCOTUS) decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending the 50-year-old precedent that constitutionally protected abortion in our country. The consequences of the Supreme Court decision are devastating for communities nationwide: twenty-six states are poised to ban or significantly restrict abortion access now that *Roe* is gone.

In New York City, we have already seen the impact of this decision. At PPGNY's NYC health centers, we have welcomed patients in need from states like Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana and

Florida where abortion restrictions have forced individuals to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to secure care. We have also seen attempts by state legislatures throughout the country to restrict access to care for young people, including gender expansive youth. In the last year, there were a series of legislative efforts that limited access to gender affirming care for young people, leaving many without the care they deserve.

Despite these challenges, we continue to provide vital health care through in-person visits and telehealth appointments. At PPGNY, we are prepared to respond to this moment of crisis and ensure care for all. We have increased our ability to provide same day appointments for abortion care and recently launched our virtual health center, further ensuring all our patients, including young people, can get the care they deserve from the place they are most comfortable.

#### Expanding Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Young People

PPGNY is deeply committed to youth empowerment and ensuring that all our patients can secure the health care and education they need and deserve. Supporting young people during this critical time in our country is vital. The decision to overturn Roe v. Wade and other attacks on sexual and reproductive health care access could potentially impact young people throughout our city. That is why we respectfully request funding from the Speaker's initiative to support our Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program and youth serving programs. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about their rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care to overcome barriers and stigma that teens may experience when accessing care. The YHP program is unique in that it taps into credible peer youth messaging to advance sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people throughout New York City. The YHPs engage their peers through a series of community and virtual events and robust social media engagement that promotes health care access in fun and interactive ways. In 2023, the Youth Health Promoters reached over 1,000 youth through sexual & reproductive health rights & access workshops at schools and in the community. Funding from the City Council will allow the YHPs to expand their peer engagement work to ensure more young people have access to the care they need.

Though NY state law requires students receive one semester of comprehensive health education by a certified health instructor in both middle school and high school, there are no meaningful enforcement measures to ensure sexuality education is taught in New York City schools or that it is comprehensive, and as such, students' experiences vary widely. The YHP program can help address gaps in access to comprehensive sexual health education for young people.

This funding will also support our Signature Programs which further connect youth in middle school, high school, and college to critical sexual and reproductive health services and resources. Through the Signature Programs, highly trained health educators facilitate workshops for young people throughout New York City to raise awareness of PPGNY's broad range of services and help young people make informed health care decisions. Health educators collaborate with YHPs to develop social media content and outreach strategies to educate and raise awareness about health and reproductive justice related issues.

PPGNY also seeks funding from the **LGBTQIA**+ **Inclusive Curriculum Initiative to increase our capacity to provide quality sexuality education to young people, including LGBTQIA**+ **youth.** PPGNY's education department has worked with schools and youth-oriented programs for years to provide comprehensive sexuality education to young people throughout NYC. In 2023, our education team served almost 9,000 middle and high school students in schools throughout the city. Following national sexuality education standards, our education team crafts age-appropriate, gender inclusive, and culturally competent workshops that educate young people on a variety of sexual health topics. This information equips young people with information to make informed health decisions. These workshops include information on human development: including puberty, anatomy, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It also helps young people safely navigate romantic and platonic relationships, and develop personal skills including setting boundaries, negotiating, and decision-making.

We are also seeking funding from the Educational Programs for Students Initiative to support our Project SHINE (Sexual Health Innovation Network for Equitable Education) Program. Project SHINE aims to provide young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with the fullest range of sexual and reproductive health information and care they need and want. Project SHINE envisions a world where youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities have equitable access to high-quality information and affordable health care, and with supportive laws and policies that ensure the greatest autonomy and informed sexual well-being possible across the lifespan.

PPGNY created a multidisciplinary network of providers to collectively identify and address gaps in sexual health care access for young people with disabilities who often face biases when navigating the complex health care landscape. These biases compound the inequities faced in accessing positive sexuality supports and services. Project SHINE aims to help close these long-standing gaps. Sexuality education can reinforce the rights of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities to make informed choices and participate in their communities in the ways they want. With the support of the Council, Project SHINE will be able to craft innovative sexuality education tools, help educate parents and caregivers support the young people in their lives and equip educators and professionals with the skills to be more responsive to their neurodivergent students.

#### **Ensuring Access to Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Services**

With the ever-changing national landscape and continued attempts to restrict access to care, New York is seen as a haven for critical health care services. **We ask the council to continue to fund PPGNY through the Reproductive and Sexual and Health Initiative** to allow us to continue to provide sexual and reproductive health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. PPGNY provides the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all five of our NYC health centers. The increase in funding will also mitigate the impact of the rising cost of health care due to inflation impacting individuals and organizations in our city. The funding would support our work to meet the city's growing health care needs. PPGNY is proud to provide services no matter what, yet inflated health care costs leave us prone to providing uncompensated care.

This funding allows PPGNY to continue to provide health care services in New York City to our most vulnerable patients, who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. In 2023, PPGNY conducted over 70,000 patient visits for sexual and reproductive health care to patients in New York City. Additionally, this funding will support our YHP program.

We also request support from the Trans Equity initiative to help empower the trans and gender non-binary (TGNB) populations to lead healthy lives by expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services and gender affirming care at our health centers. The importance of this funding cannot be overstated. Increased funding will allow PPGNY to provide this critical care to a community that has been historically marginalized and denied access to the health care they deserve. PPGNY offers trans/nonbinary care to all via telehealth and in the Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan health centers. In 2023, almost 2,000 patient visits were conducted for gender affirming hormone therapy. PPGNY is ready to provide care to all individuals in need of this critical care as states across the country enact anti-gender affirming care policies that primarily target young people. The millions of Americans who depend on these services will look to NYC to secure the care they deserve. The cost of medications associated with this care can also be burdensome, even for those who are insured.

#### Conclusion

PPGNY continues to be committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers, no matter their background, get the care they need. It is important that the Council support services and programs to that focus on our most vulnerable populations. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure healthcare access to all.

Thank you.

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Testimony of Ashley Rajkumar, Senior Case Manager Safe Horizon Streetwork Project

### On the Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget

Committee on Children and Youth Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

New York City Council

3.22.2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Ashley Rajkumar, and I am Senior Case Manager of Streetwork Project LES, a program of Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity and justice to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the positions we hold.

Whether we are called on to provide expert testimony at an oversight hearing or to assist a constituent in crisis and in need of emergency services, we are proud to partner with the City Council in a collective effort to make our city safer for all. We look forward to helping you and your staff learn how best to support survivors and connect them to the resources available in your borough and community.

Over many years, the City Council has been a key supporter of our programs helping adult, adolescent, and child victims of violence and abuse. City Council funding fills in gaps where no other financial support exists and allows us to draw down critical dollars from other sources. Moreover, this funding demonstrates the value that you and your colleagues place in helping survivors of all ages access desperately-needed shelter, support services, legal assistance, and counseling.

The City Council has also championed the human services nonprofit sector. Our sector desperately needs your help to ensure that human services workers across our sector receive the compensation and support we need. To be frank – our sector is in crisis. Nonprofit human services organizations are shuttering as a result of delayed contracts and payments. And nonprofits across the sector are struggling to hire and retain staff as a result of an unjust wage structure largely determined by government contracts.

The City of New York contracts with nonprofits to deliver the essential services so many New Yorkers rely on – for food, for safety, for shelter, etc. However, the City too often asks our community of nonprofits to do more with less and to accept the bare minimum. This means that many - too many - nonprofit human services workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are barely surviving on the wages paid by underfunded City contracts. Because many survivors come into victim services work to help other survivors, City funding for the nonprofit victim services sector is an economic justice issue for survivors. To live up to our shared values of equity, equality, and supporting communities, our City must commit to fully funding a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) and other fair and just investments to our sector, to fully funding city contracts at appropriate levels to allow non-profits to offer competitive living wage salaries, and to paying organizations on time for the work we have already done. Pay equity is a racial justice issue, a gender justice issue, and an economic justice issue.

My testimony today focuses on the needs of the nonprofit human services sector, with specific focus on the #JustPay campaign. I also write about a \$3M MOCJ PEG we are deeply concerned about. I will highlight the City Council discretionary and initiative funding that Safe Horizon relies on to provide essential services to survivors of violence and abuse across the five boroughs. Lastly, Safe Horizon is a proud member of both the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC) and Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY), and we wholeheartedly endorse their budget recommendations.

#### **#JustPay - COLA for Human Services Workers**

Safe Horizon is a proud member of the <u>#JustPay campaign</u>, which is a racial equity and gender justice campaign committed to ending the government exploitation of human services workers. The #JustPay campaign is demanding that sector employees under contract with New York City and State be paid fair wages for their labor.

Each year you hear from providers who are struggling due to the crisis of compounding underfunding of the human services sector as City budgets are balanced on the backs of low-income neighborhoods and BIPOC communities. This practice has resulted in poverty-level wages for human services workers, who are predominantly women (66%) and people of color (68%).

We thank the Administration and the City Council for including a 9.27% wage increase for City-contracted human services workers, as this \$741 million investment is a significant step in fairly compensating frontline workers. By committing to meaningful, yearly increases in salaries to help workers keep up with cost-of-living, the City has supported the sector in undoing decades of underfunding for human services. More must be done to achieve true livable wages and fair funding on government contracts, but this is a remarkable investment and acknowledgement of how important these workers are to New York. We look forward to working with the City for a seamless COLA implementation so that organizations receive their funding on time to distribute to the 80,000 City-contracted human services workers.

During the pandemic, Streetwork increased our services for street homeless youth and worked to build important connections to other essential services that helped our clients survive the multiple health crises happening at once. And we did this all while facing major staffing and capacity issues. It is difficult to recruit qualified candidates and keep staff when our contracts underpay positions. This is especially heart-breaking for our programs because we know that staff turnover severely impedes continuity of services and relationship-building with youth. Our clients often distrust authority figures and have often experienced trauma related to being abandoned by caregivers. Trust is built over time, through serious work by both clients and staff members. When staff leave, the young folks we work with experience setbacks, which makes it <u>that</u> much harder to build further trust. If our contracts not only adequately but abundantly covered staff lines, we would not experience the staffing and capacity issues that impede this essential work.

#### Restore \$3 million MOCJ PEG for "Crime Victim Services Re-estimate."

The Mayor's FY25 Preliminary Budget inexplicably slashes services for crime victims by \$3 million, even as concerns about the impact of violence and abuse continue to be on the minds of many New Yorkers. The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) explains that the PEG is tied to underspending by contracted providers, when in reality the City either imposed a hiring freeze or was so delinquent in processing contracts that providers were unable to hire staff. Safe Horizon strongly urges the City Council to advocate with the Mayor to restore this PEG in the forthcoming FY25 Executive Budget and include this in the Council's Preliminary Budget Response.

#### **Initiative and Discretionary Funding**

City Council initiative and discretionary funding contracted through the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) supports the following Safe Horizon programs:

#### **Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)**

Child abuse cases grab at the heartstrings of every New Yorker. We recoil at the very thought of someone knowingly harming a child, and we entrust a number of different agencies - the police, prosecutors, child welfare specialists, doctors - to investigate and respond to these cases and help ensure the safety of children placed in harm's way. For many years, these agencies worked almost entirely in silos, focusing on their specific roles in uncovering what took place, or responding to the child, or holding the offender accountable. Such a disconnected approach required that children disclose repeatedly the painful details of the harm they endured in a variety of settings not commonly thought of as "child-friendly" – police precincts, district attorneys' office, and hospital emergency rooms. Over and over, children would be asked to talk about the violence they suffered, only to have to repeat their story yet again every time a new investigator stepped into the picture. Each time, the child wondered how many more times they would have to relive this pain so that another adult could write down some notes and ask yet another round of probing, deeply personal questions. Many child victims were left feeling as if no one believed them and felt to blame for causing disruption to their families. This method of investigating incidents of abuse was traumatizing, stigmatizing, and unjust.

For many years now, child victims in New York City who experience severe physical or sexual abuse are brought to Safe Horizon's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), which are at the forefront of the city's response to child abuse. At our CACs, child victims of sexual and/or severe physical abuse receive the help they need quickly and in one location. The police, prosecutors, medical professionals, victim advocates, clinicians, and child protective caseworkers are all under one roof in a child-friendly environment that minimizes trauma and facilitates healing. This allows us to facilitate a swift, comprehensive, coordinated investigation and multi-disciplinary team response that significantly reduces the number of times children must disclose details of their abuse. This coordinated, trauma-informed response to abuse helps to prevent the re-traumatization of the child during each re-telling of the violence that took place. In FY23, our CACs provided services to over 9,200 children and over 3,500 caregivers throughout the five boroughs. The City Council supports our CACs through the **Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault**, contracted through ACS.

We are requesting a restoration and an enhancement to \$1,250,000 in FY25 to sustain general operations in our CACs across the five boroughs so we can continue to provide healing and support to child victims. Additionally, we are seeking for this core funding to be baselined to ensure the City's continued investment in the CAC model.

#### Streetwork Project

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and so much more, in a therapeutic harm reduction

community serving homeless youth ages 13 to 25. We work with homeless and street-involved young people to help them find safety and stability. Many homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to survive, which can lead to physical and emotional harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that led to their homelessness. We welcome these young people, help them navigate complex systems, and provide essential resources at our Drop-In Centers, at our overnight shelter, and through our street outreach teams. This work can be incredibly challenging but also rewarding. Our work at Streetwork did not pause during this pandemic. Rather, our dedicated team continued to respond to homeless and at-risk young people in need of shelter, services, and understanding. Streetwork has been doing this community-based work since 1984, and we will continue to do so for as long as our services are needed. Over the past several months, Streetwork has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of migrant young people seeking help and having nowhere else to go.

In FY23, our Streetwork Project provided services to 999 clients across our drop-in centers and overnight shelter, while our overnight street outreach team engaged in nearly 13,000 contacts with homeless and at-risk young people. The City Council supports Streetwork Project's work through the **Supports for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Initiative**, contracted through DYCD.

The Support for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Initiative bolsters Streetwork's ability to provide services and access to housing to young people engaged in the sex trade. With this funding, we have been able to increase our engagement and response to the number of young people both in the Drop-In Center and on the streets who are in crisis and involved in the sex trade and to connect them to supportive counseling, access to benefits and housing, and primary and mental healthcare. Safe Horizon is seeking a restoration of \$456,697 to continue to bolster our response and offer critical services to this vulnerable population navigating homelessness, violence, racism, and so many other traumas.

#### **Immigration Law Project**

Safe Horizon's Immigration Violence Law Project (ILP) provides expert legal advice and representation to victims of crime, violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture. ILP staff help guide their clients through complex immigration proceedings and assist them in VAWA self-petitions, petitions for U nonimmigrant status and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), applications for asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship, as well as in removal defense. ILP receives referrals internally from Safe Horizon's other programs, such as our domestic violence shelters and our Crime Victim Assistance Program, as well as externally from the immigration courts, law enforcement agencies, other community-based organizations, legislators, and from former and current clients. ILP strives to provide the highest quality services to a very vulnerable population. Clients live in all five boroughs and experience a multitude of victimization including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. As a result of the steady transfer of recent arrivals at the southern border to New York City, Safe Horizon's ILP has seen a dramatic increase of survivors seeking our immediate assistance. In addition, the overwhelmed systems have left countless in tenuous circumstances-food and housing insecure and desperate for work-making them even more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and trafficking and in need of our support and services. The City has prioritized assisting migrants with completing asylum applications, but nonprofit civil legal providers with expertise in complex immigration cases have not seen equitable investments in our services, namely more comprehensive legal screenings and longterm representation and assistance. Without additional resources, we are simply unable to serve everyone who seeks our help.

In FY23, ILP provided full representation, advice, and consults to over 800 clients and also provided over 5,800 telephonic information and referral services. The City Council supports ILP through the **Young Women's Initiative (YWI)**, contracted through DYCD.

The City Council's **Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence Initiative** – part of the **Young Women's Initiative (YWI)** – allows Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project to provide full representation to immigrant victims of domestic violence. The majority of these cases include clients or families where there is a survivor of domestic or sexual violence and where the victim is between the ages of 16 and 24. To help ensure that our Immigration Law Project has the capacity to respond to pressing legal cases for immigrant and undocumented survivors, including those who submitted an asylum application but now need representation and/or screening for additional immigration options beyond asylum, we are seeking an enhancement to \$100,000 to Safe Horizon through the YWI - Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence Initiative in FY25.

#### **SafeChat**

Safe Horizon offers a continuum of service for all victims of crime through telephonic, live chat, and/or in-person supports. Safe Horizon's SafeChat is a live chat platform that allows victims of all forms of crime and abuse to access Safe Horizon services digitally. Crime victims utilize their computer, phone, or tablet to safely and confidentially engage in a one-on-one chat with trained Safe Horizon Live Chat Specialists by visiting safehorizon.org. Live Chat Specialists utilize a best practice, client-centered approach to engage with victims by providing information and referrals across NYC, supporting victims in fully assessing their safety, and collaborating with victims to develop comprehensive safety plans. Live Chat Specialists conduct safety assessment, safety planning, crisis counseling, supportive counseling, psychoeducation, information about and referrals to supporting resources. In FY23, SafeChat responded to over 1,000 chats from survivors.

The City Council supports our SafeChat through a **Speaker's Initiative**, contracted through DYCD. In FY22, Safe Horizon was awarded **Speaker's Initiative** funding to launch a SafeChat microsite intentionally directed towards young men of color. The site provides educational materials related to trauma and provides access to our live chat platform. We again received Speaker's Initiative funding in FY23 and FY24 to support the salary of a SafeChat Live Chat Specialist and enhance our ability to respond in particular to young men of color seeking help. This year, we are seeking **a restoration to our FY23 funding of \$150,000** in Speaker's Initiative funding to continue to support SafeChat's operations and the salary of a SafeChat Live Chat Specialist. This support allows us to respond in particular to young men of color seeking help and intentionally build avenues for young men of color to access supportive services and healing.

#### New York Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) Recommendations

Lastly, Safe Horizon joins the calls of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) and RHY advocates across NYC in urging the City Council to work with Mayor Adams and all elected and government

officials across our city to meaningfully support RHY, connect them to safe, stable housing, and end youth homelessness. Safe Horizon is a proud member of the New York Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY), which is a consortium of over 60 agencies working to improve the lives of runaway, homeless, and street-involved youth across New York State. We work to recognize and uphold the plight of homelessness among young people across ethnicities, genders, and orientations and promote the safety, health, and future of unhoused youth across New York State. CHY has crafted a list of policy recommendations that our government partners can implement this year to meaningfully address and end our youth housing and homelessness crisis.

To meet the needs of RHY, the following must be prioritized in FY25:

- Fund Support Services for Youth New Arrivals and Unaccompanied Minors: \$1.63M DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers have been going above and beyond to meet the growing needs of newly arrived youth and unaccompanied minors without any additional support. We are asking for a one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Center contracts. This additional funding will support meeting the basic needs of young people and fund more appropriate staffing across the sites.
- "Right-size" Runaway and Homeless Youth Residential Contracts: \$5.5M

DYCD-funded RHY provider contracts continue to fall short of covering the true cost of running the programs. We are requesting that all current DYCD-funded Crisis and Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Program contracts be increased to \$55,500. This will cover the baselining of all residential bed rates across contract years, plus a 10% increase for all current DYCD-funded residential RHY contracts.

Streetwork's contracts either do not cover or insufficiently cover: assistance accessing housing & exiting homelessness; showers; laundry services; peer education; sexual health and peer programs; sexual health interventions; assistance obtaining HRA and SSA benefits; needle exchange and overdose prevention services; groups; food, pantry, and soup kitchen/hot meals; socks, underwear, and clothing; hygiene supplies; and baby/child/parenting supplies and services.

We need additional funding to meet the very real demands of our clients. For example, we are currently nowhere near meeting the demand for assistance obtaining housing and exiting homelessness. With funding that matches the need, we could place significantly more clients into housing. We need more funding to cover paid peer internships, job skills and job search assistance, benefits assistance, 24/7 drop-in services, and case management. Our contracts pay for these services but at rates that nowhere meet the overwhelming needs of RHY in NYC.

#### • Fund Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services: \$625,000

Young people in DYCD programs have been excluded from access to city-funded legal support, and most young people qualify for youth-specific immigration relief (ie SIJS) that the city does not currently fund. Funding should be made immediately available for five positions for full-time experienced lawyers, who will be awarded to DYCD-funded RHY programs through an RFP based on the documented need for such services.

• Maintain funding for the 16 Housing Specialists in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.5M The current Housing Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers are temporarily funded through federal Emergency Housing Voucher funding which is set to expire at the end of the fiscal year (June 2024). Data already demonstrates their success through the record number of youth that have exited homelessness into their own apartments since their inception. Maintaining these positions will ensure that RHY continue to successfully transition to their own apartments and support the Administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis.

Currently, we have one non-temporary, full-time position, funded by a private foundation, that helps our clients access permanent housing. This staff person does not have the capacity to help every client who needs housing. Streetwork has one of the best reputations across DYCD-contracted RHY programs for assisting clients in accessing permanent housing. With additional housing specialists, we are able to place significantly more clients in housing.

• Restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System: \$1.6M

In response to the priorities set forth in Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness, funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers. Unfortunately, these critical positions that provide peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults were cut in FY24 and should be restored.

#### • Fund 100 additional DYCD RHY beds: \$5.6M

Over the past year, it has been increasingly difficult to secure a vacant DYCD RHY bed for a young person experiencing homelessness. There simply are not enough beds to meet the need. Funding needs to be made available to add 60 beds for Runaway and Homeless Youth (16-20yo) and 40 beds for Homeless Young Adults (21-24yo), which will expand the current DYCD RHY bed portfolio by 100 beds. In addition, DYCD must prioritize allocating any new beds that are funded to serve populations with the greatest documented need in areas that are easily accessible to young people.

Many young adults refuse to go to or return to DHS shelters because these shelters can be traumatizing and violent for them. When youth shelter placement is not available, many young people opt for street homelessness or risky housing options (like living with an abusive intimate partner). NYC must increase the number of DYCD RHY beds available for youth aged 21-24 years.

#### • Give Runaway and Homeless Youth CityFHEPS vouchers

The Adams Administration must implement the CityFHEPS laws that took effect on January 9th, 2024, which will finally make youth experiencing homelessness in DYCD-funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first to enter the DHS shelter system. As stated above, the DHS system is traumatizing and dangerous for many of the young people we work with. It is

unconscionable to require that RHY enter into the DHS system when they should be able to access a voucher through the DYCD programs they already have a relationship with.

#### **Conclusion**

As the City Council and the Administration sets the budget for the next fiscal year, it's imperative that our city expand, perfect, create, and invest in programming that provides healing and support to people who have experienced harm, violence, and trauma. When we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of individual New Yorkers, we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of New York City as a whole.

And it is essential that the City invest in the nonprofit human services workforce that we collectively rely on to support our safety net. We urge you and your colleagues to listen to providers and our dedicated workforce. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony.

#### Safe Horizon FY25 Expense Funding Requests



#### Speaker's Initiative – Restoration to FY23 level of \$150,000 for SafeChat (#173080)

Safe Horizon's SafeChat is a live chat platform that allows victims of all forms of crime and abuse to access Safe Horizon services digitally. Crime victims utilize their computer, phone, or tablet to safely and confidentially engage in a one-on-one chat with trained Safe Horizon Live Chat Specialists through the Safe Horizon website (www.safehorizon.org). Specialists utilize a best practice, client-centered approach to engage with victims by providing information and referrals across NYC, supporting victims in fully assessing their safety, and collaborating with victims to develop comprehensive safety plans. One of our goals is to increase accessibility to needed services for young men of color. Research shows that young men of color are more likely to experience harm, yet Safe Horizon has found that young men of color are not accessing our services at a corresponding rate. This funding supports the salary of a SafeChat Live Chat Specialist and increases our ability to respond in particular to young men of color seeking help.

#### DOVE Initiative – Restoration of \$12,010,000 gross (\$859,000 to Safe Horizon) (#171946)

Since 2006, Safe Horizon has successfully administered the City Council's Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DOVE) Initiative. Currently, more than 150 organizations across NYC use DOVE funding to address domestic violence in the community by providing legal services, crisis intervention, case management, outreach, education, and training. Safe Horizon oversees this entire project and ensures fiscal and programmatic compliance. We provide in-depth training on program development and evaluation to help organizations stay competitive in future funding environments, as well as networking opportunities to help DOVE-funded organizations learn from each other and coordinate services. DOVE has been a lifesaver for New Yorkers in every neighborhood and every community who are navigating these uncertain times. As we advocate for options for victims and survivors both inside and outside traditional criminal justice responses, DOVE is pivotal. DOVE directs funds to the organizations rooted in community that provide necessary and lifesaving supports to survivors.

#### Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault – Restoration and Enhancement to \$1,250,000 (#172004)

Safe Horizon's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are at the forefront of the city's response to child abuse. At Safe Horizon's CACs, child victims of sexual and/or severe physical abuse receive the help they need quickly and in one location. The police, prosecutors, medical professionals, victim advocates, clinicians, and child protective caseworkers are all under one roof in a child-friendly environment that minimizes trauma and facilitates healing. This allows us to facilitate a swift, comprehensive, coordinated investigation and multi-disciplinary team response to abuse. During the pandemic, our CACs remained open as essential programming and continued to provide critical supports to survivors of child abuse and their families. We are now serving more children than before the pandemic. We are requesting an enhancement to \$1,250,000 to sustain general operations in our CACs across the five boroughs.

#### Supports for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade – Restoration of \$456,697 (#173030)

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 16 to 25. This funding allows our team to respond more robustly to young people both in our drop-in centers and on the streets who are in crisis and involved in the sex trades. We connect them to supportive counseling, access to benefits and housing, and primary and mental healthcare as they navigate homelessness, violence, and other traumas.

#### Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE) Initiative – Restoration of \$275,000 (#172938)

Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) utilizes funding through the Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE) Initiative to provide direct legal services to indigent victims of domestic violence in Family, Supreme, and Integrated DV Courts throughout the city. We assist with orders of protection, child support, custody, visitation, and uncontested divorce proceedings. We also run a legal helpline that provides information, referrals, and assistance to domestic violence survivors.

#### Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations - Restoration of \$150,000 (#173053)

The work of the Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations Initiative aligns with Safe Horizon's commitment to working with young Black and brown men who have experienced harm and violence. This funding increases our capacity to connect community members who have experienced harm, with a particular focus on young men of color, to our continuum of services, including counseling and mental health supports. Our Helpline and SafeChat serve as a first point of contact, linking to our Community Programs for ongoing coordination within Safe Horizon and beyond.

#### Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative – Restoration of \$140,000 (#172959)

The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative allows us to address the impact of traumatic experiences that are so often at the root of behaviors that precipitate involvement in family court of children and youth. There is growing recognition of the many types of traumas (interpersonal violence, community violence, historical racism, systemic violence, and daily experiences of racism and other forms of oppression) that impact young people. Our project enhances trauma-informed care for youth by creating and providing training for a short-term trauma-focused intervention that helps survivors identify trauma reactions and practice coping strategies for managing them.

#### Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative – Restoration of \$115,385 (#172970)

The Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative supports our work with infants and toddlers who are survivors of crime, as well as their families, through training of clinicians and staff in an attachment-based intervention that facilitates healing and supports healthy development. Our Counseling Center uses a curriculum on how exposure to domestic violence, the dynamics of domestic violence, and the systems of oppression families experiencing DV often encounter all come together in ways that can disrupt the bond

between infants and their caregivers. By training a greater number of individuals who come into contact with these children, we can prevent lifelong developmental consequences while providing healing and relief.

## Initiative for Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence – Restoration and Enhancement to \$100,000 (#172108)

The Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence Initiative – part of the Young Women's Initiative (YWI) – allows Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project (ILP) to provide full representation and consultations to young immigrant victims of domestic violence from across NYC. The majority of these cases include clients or families where there is a survivor of domestic or sexual violence and where the victim is between the ages of 16 and 24. As a result of the steady transfer of recent arrivals at the southern border to New York City, Safe Horizon's ILP has seen an increase of survivors seeking our immediate assistance. In addition, the overwhelmed systems have left countless in tenuous circumstances—food and housing insecure and desperate for work—making them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and in need of our support and services. Without additional resources, we are unable to serve everyone who seeks our help.

#### Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) – Restoration and Enhancement to \$100,000 (#172917)

Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project (ILP) utilizes funding through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) to provide expert legal advice and representation to undocumented victims of crime, violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture. ILP staff help guide their clients through complex immigration proceedings and assist them with applications for U-Visas, T-Visas, VAWA self-petitions, asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship, as well as in removal defense. ILP has experienced a significant increase in demand for legal assistance over the past several years. The steady flow of new arrivals to New York from border states, coupled with the fact that many New York-area immigration legal service providers are not accepting new intakes, drives many individuals and families desperate for immigration legal help to our office, which has remained open and serving clients even during the height of the pandemic. This funding allows ILP to serve more immigrant survivors. Without additional resources, we are unable to serve everyone who seeks our help.

#### Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative – Restoration of \$44,560 (#173001)

The Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative helps Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project increase our capacity to connect potentially Hepatitis C-affected clients to testing, medical care, treatment, and infection control services.

#### Community Safety and Victim Services Initiative – Individual Member Awards (#173099)

These awards support Safe Horizon's client-centered trauma-informed response to victims and survivors in individual districts. Awards in FY24 supported our Court Programs, Counseling Center, and Community Programs. We are seeking additional support for our Immigration Law Project (ILP) and Anti-Trafficking Program (ATP), given the dramatic increase of requests for our legal services and supports.

For more information, please contact: Michael Polenberg at <u>michael.polenberg@safehorizon.org</u> or 212-577-7735 or Jimmy Meagher at <u>james.meagher@safehorizon.org</u> or 212-577-4370



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<u>Testimony to Children and Youth Committee</u> From Trenton Price – Executive Director, Salvadori Center Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Thank you, Chair Stevens, and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Trenton Price, and I am the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center. I am a former middle school teacher, school leader, and district leader for arts education here in New York City before joining Salvadori last year. I am passionate about education and facilitating experiences for young people to work together and empower their creative and analytical voices.

At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services – that is STEM plus the A for Arts, and in our case, Architecture – to schools, afterschool sites, and NYCHA community centers across the five boroughs focusing on the built environment. For context, last year, Salvadori taught over 8,000 students in 129 schools and NYCHA community centers. Our goal is to make STEM and the arts come alive for students, and to foster the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving – just like real-life architects, designers, and engineers.

We are grateful to have the support of the Council through multiple CASA and Digital Inclusion & Literacy grants as well as After School Enrichment and the Speaker's Initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the City. It is this work from the Speaker's Initiative that brings me here today. As a long-time partner of NYCHA for over 15 years, we see first-hand the need for robust out-of-school time programming for children and youth. In our programs, young people clamor for the opportunity to work together and build solutions to design challenges that impact their communities. These real-life challenges engage their brains, foster collaboration, and make connections to career pathways they may not have considered. With so many pressing priorities for residents of NYCHA and other shelters, we know programming for children and youth can sometimes feel like less of a priority. But to the contrary ~ investing in pathways for children and youth is one of the most critical things we can do to support the success of future generations. I want to thank the Council for your investment in the futures of our youth, and encourage you to continue to deepen that support for out-of-school programming for young people in NYCHA and shelters who need it the most. Thank you, and please continue to support CASA, After School Enrichment, and the Speaker's Initiative to ensure those out-of-school opportunities are available for our most vulnerable children and youth.

I thank you for facilitating this hearing and for your commitment to supporting each and every young person in our City. We are grateful to be able to serve New York City's children and youth and stand ready to do more. Thank you.



\$ \$

# Testimony of St. Nicks Alliance Before the New York City Council

### FY 2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing: March 22, 2024 Committee on Children and Youth Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair

### Submitted by Debra Sue Lorenzen, Director of Youth and Education

My name is Debra Sue Lorenzen. I am the Director of Youth and Education for St. Nicks Alliance in North Brooklyn. St. Nicks Alliance serves more than 10,000 youth and their families through comprehensive youth and education services for ages 2-24 years old.

I want to begin by thanking City Council for its commitment to DYCD's essential programs such as COMPASS, SONYC, Beacons, Cornerstones and SYEP. They enable community-based organizations to help children, teens and families regain footing after the pandemic in so many ways-from socio-emotional wellness to financial stability to academic recovery. I am writing to implore City Council to continue to strengthen the investments in DYCD.

#### Restore \$6.9 million to save afterschool programming for 3,538 students

St. Nicks Alliance and its affiliate School Settlement Association manage 24 NYC Department of Youth and Community Develpment contracts that include COMPASS, SONYC, Beacons, Cornerstone and SYEP. Together, these contracts serve more than 7,100 North Brooklyn residents through St. Nicks Alliance's School Success and Career GPS Models. Among St. Nicks Alliance's overenrolled services are 12 afterschool centers for K-12 graders, funded through New York City's Comprehensive Afterschool System (COMPASS) portfolio and overseen by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). They allow the out-of-school hours to uplift children, teens and their families through transformative services, from literacy to workplace readiness to counseling.

The Mayor's budget has targeted two program models for cuts, which we urge City Council to restore:

- COMPASS Explore serves grades K-12 students. This unique model allowed providers to develop specialized programming to engage youth in experiential learning opportunities.
- SONYC serves grades 6-8. Middle school youth are engaged in rigorous afterschool activities, structured as clubs, emphasizing student voice and choice.\$

According to the November Plan, citywide this cut will result in **3,538 young people losing access to afterschool programming and a loss of \$6.9 million dedicated to afterschool programming** in FY25. The number affected in North Brooklyn is not yet established, but we know that any cuts will be harmful to our youth and families. Afterschool services continue to prove essential to helping youth "catch up" across all domains of child development, from socioemotional to academics to physical development. Any reduction decreases the number of youth that can be served and the amount of citywide funding dedicated to afterschool programming. This means that DYCD's forthcoming afterschool procurement will have a smaller overall pot of funding to invest in afterschool programming, perpetuating an overall smaller, and possibly still underfunded, citywide after school system, a shift that does not reflect the need felt by St. Nicks Alliance, our fellow CBOs or the City's reports.

# The City must restore \$6.9 million in afterschool funding by extending the COMPASS Explore contracts, and restoring cuts to SONYC programming.

### Restore \$19.6 million to preserve Summer Rising programming for middle school students

St. Nicks Alliance operates 10 Summer Rising sites serving 1,400 of North Brooklyn's children. When the City restored Summer Rising funding to the NYCPS's budget, they left in place severe cuts to DYCD and the CBOs who operate the afternoon enrichment programming portion of Summer Rising.

If maintained, this \$19.6 million cut will result in a drastic reduction to programming for middle school students this summer - a complete cut to Friday programming and a 2-hour reduction to the remaining program days. With middle school programming reduced to 4 days a week and ending two hours early the remaining four days a week, this equates to a loss of 18 hours of programming per week.

These savings are short-sited and harmful to our students, families and community-based organizations. very concerned about the safety of middle school students who will be left without structure or supervision. Reduced days will have a negative impact on Summer Rising attendance, and therefore student outcomes, as Friday field days incentivize children to attend Summer Rising all week long. The City has provided no alternative for families who rely on this programming in order to stay in the workforce while school is out. Further, while NYC cuts costs, CBO's do not-they must still cover the cost of full-time employees without adequate funding from NYC to do so.

#### The City must restore \$19.6 million in Summer Rising funding to middle school programs.

Thank you for your consideration of St. Nicks Alliance's written testimony and for your deep commitment to NYC's children and youth.

# **SYMPHONY SPACE**

#### Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing – Children & Youth March 22, 2024

Thank you to Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support of the children of New York City. As Executive Director of Symphony Space. I am writing to advocate for the importance of arts education, and for funding for the arts in NYC schools.

We are a performing arts and arts education organization located at 95<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, but our programs and their impact reach far beyond our immediate geography.

Since 1980, Symphony Space's education programs have reached more than 300,000 New York City students across all five boroughs, from pre-Kindergarteners through 12th graders who participate in our *Global Arts* workshops and performances.

For over 40 years, Symphony Space has provided New York City school students with curriculum-based arts programs that bring the arts of global cultures into the classroom. For some students, these workshops, and the field trips to our theater to see the vibrant live performances, are a window onto unfamiliar cultures. For others, our programming provides a mirror in which they see their own histories represented, something they do not typically experience in their schools.

This year alone, our *Global Arts* program brought over 15,000 public school students in 50 schools (many of them Title I) on a journey of exploration and celebration of the history and cultures of Native America, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Our programs helped students gain a better understanding of the beautiful multicultural world around them – in their schools, in their communities, in our city, and beyond their own geographies.

Over 80 experienced teaching artists, who hail from all throughout the city, lead workshops in music, dance, visual arts, theater arts, literary arts, and storytelling across cultures. Through our inquiry-based activities, students learned to interpret and analyze traditional art forms, as well as how those art forms are being carried forward in modern times.

As for conveying our impact, I leave that to a teacher at P.S. 75, who said:

"As a result of what your Native American teaching artists do, my students are able to see and witness that Native American culture is very much alive - while we can't change the past, we can preserve history and the love of world cultures to teach the young people who will lead in the future."

That is what the arts do—on our stages and in our classrooms—they open up the world. The support of the City Council, and this committee, which has been so dedicated to all of our young people, is crucial as we collectively keep New York City the most vibrant arts landscape in the world. We are so grateful for your service and your tenacity in this challenging time.

Respectfully submitted by Kathy Landau, Executive Director of Symphony Space

#### Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth -- Preliminary Budget Hearing Friday, March 22, 2024 The 92nd Street Y, New York

Thank you to the New York City Council and this Committee for the opportunity to share testimony on cultural outreach related to children and youth. My name is Elizabeth Costa, and I am the Vice President of Government and Community Relations at The 92nd Street Y, New York (92NY), a nonprofit cultural and community center in Manhattan.

Since 92NY's founding 150 years ago, services for children, their families and caregivers have been offered. We strive to provide high quality, innovative educational, cultural and developmental experiences that empower children and youth who will most benefit from them. While 92NY is based on the Upper East Side, we reach children and youth in all five boroughs.

A primary focus of 92NY's actions to serve New York City youth is through arts education programs created by our School Engagement in the Arts department. Each year, we connect about 6,500 students annually with artists of the highest caliber through instruction and live events at 92NY. During the 2023-24 school year, 92NY is working with 53 schools Citywide to provide a variety of cultural education experiences taking place during school hours, after school and on weekends. They include:

- Discovery Series: 92NY's Discovery Series features celebrated performers from around the globe, illuminating connections between cultures and artistic traditions.
  - Through lively classroom sessions with their dedicated Teaching Artists and attendance at exhilarating performances at 92NY, approximately 2,500 to 3,500 students in grades 2 to 3 are exploring rich dance traditions from around the world and grades 4 to 5 are exploring the world's musical genres.
  - Of note is that the demographics for this program include:
    - 75% of partner schools have Title I status.
    - The majority of our partner schools receive significant subsidies to participate in the Discovery Series.
- Concerts Schools Project: Each year, approximately 300 students from 8 to 10 public high schools across the city participate in this free music education enhancement program.
  - Students attend live concerts at 92NY and participate in pre- or post-performance Q&As with performing artists.
  - The program cultivates audience-going habits and a lifelong love of music.
- Literary Arts Program: 92NY connects 800 to 1,000 students from 15 to 20 NYC public high schools with contemporary and classic literature by reading and meeting with featured authors. Students receive in-class writing workshops led by a 92NY Teaching Artist, attend a reading and conversation with a published author at 92NY, and receive complimentary copies of books by participating authors.

Building on the work accomplished in communities Citywide, 92NY increases access for teens to further their skills in the arts through free classes and workforce development at 92NY. Three particular 92NY programs through which teens are building professional skills, a professional network, and friendships with peers from schools across the city are:

- Teen Gems offers professional trade skills training for 48 teens in basic jewelry-making techniques. This three-year old program expands professional opportunities, diversifies the arts industry pipeline, and supports teens without financial means through an opportunity to embark on a path forward into a jewelry or design industry career with confidence and entrepreneurial knowledge.
- Teen Producers offers a two-year-long, paid internship in the arts at 92NY to high school juniors and seniors.
  - Each year, 10 students from historically underrepresented backgrounds build technical, management and production skills through practical experience.
  - Participants also receive individual college application advisement and a range of career-readiness workshops.
- Teen Arts Week, a Citywide celebration of the arts created for teens, by teens. This unique initiative creates collaborations between 92NY's Teen Producers, arts organizations across New York City and arts-interested teens.
  - The program enables teens to expand their own cultural understanding and artistic skills, and explore their interests.
  - Student achievements are recognized through the Community Artist Award given for teens for their creative services to their communities.
  - During the 2024 celebration, 33 leading cultural organizations across all five boroughs offered 64 classes, workshops and performances that were free for teen participants, who registered from 150 schools Citywide.

We are fortunate to receive annual funding through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Department of Youth and Community Development, though the levels of funding have decreased in recent years as the City's budget for program services has been cut. Nonetheless, we are committed to providing significant subsidies to participating schools so that students will continue to experience high quality arts education in their classrooms and the thrill of live performances at our global community center.

Public funding is crucial for our organization to be able to provide New Yorkers with experiences that expand thinking and expression as well as bring joy. We are relieved that the recent City budget forecast is better than it was in December. However, the reductions implemented to this year's funds still negatively affect our own ability to provide the robust level of public service we would like to offer. We ask that funding be fully restored and increased as we look ahead to FY25.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Costa

Elizabeth Costa Vice President, Government and Community Relations



512 W. 143rd Street New York, NY 10031 212.283.7044 www.brotherhood-sistersol.org

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles, Director of Organizing of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

#### 22 March 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

For over 25 years, The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) has been at the forefront of social justice; educating, organizing and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. BroSis provides around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, making space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD *and* holistically support student success. Our vision for education in New York public schools includes safe, restorative, and healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must equitably resource New York State public schools and defund the tactics that push out marginalized students.

Our youth at The Brotherhood Sister Sol collectively not only want but need the city to provide NYC schools the funding for mental health support staff, along with the funding for wellness centers within their schools. In December of 2021, U.S Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy issued a public health advisory, stating that we are experiencing a "devastating mental health crisis among American youth," one made much worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, we implore New York State elected officials to create a budget that prioritizes student mental health and puts New York public schools on a path to fund a student-to-student-support-staff ratio of 1:100. This will necessitate an increase in the budget for NYS public schools so as to quadruple the number of student support staff – including but not limited to Guidance Counselors, Social Workers and Psychologists. This vision for education in New York State includes safe, restorative, healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow.

Our youth demand a cessation of the cuts to the education budget and that our elected officials protect critical programs funded with \$1 billion in federal COVID relief funds. including protecting and base-lining the current \$21 million allocation for restorative justice, \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum, and \$77 million for counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals. They know that expanding school-based restorative justice and social-emotional

supports is essential and propose investing \$75 million to hire school-based Restorative Justice Coordinators in 500 schools. Furthermore, we need continued investment in our young people both in school and in the broader community; funding like the Young Women's Initiative, Summer Youth Employment Program, and more also needs to continue.

The function of education is to advance the next generation, providing them with the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be engaged and innovative world citizens. We need elected officials to invest in our students, their successes, and their academic futures. Instead of funding surveillance and criminalization, we believe that "federal, state, and local dollars must prioritize counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses instead of police." We must deconstruct the school-to-prison pipeline and truly decriminalize low-level offenses that lead to our youth having negative contact with the state and carceral systems. And, we must do this now in order to safeguard our young people. Increasing access to quality guidance counselors, social workers, therapists, and other support staff in schools is a great way to invest in our larger communities and our holistic futures.

For more information, contact the Director of Organizing, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org



**Committee on Children & Youth** Preliminary Budget Hearing - Fiscal Year 2025 March 22, 2024

Testimony of The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center New York, NY

THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER 208 W 13 ST NEW YORK, NY 10011

T. 212.620.7310 F. 212.924.2657 gaycenter.org

# THE CENTER

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget as it relates to issues within the oversight of the Committee on Children & Youth.

New York City's LGBT community formed The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center) in 1983, in response to the AIDS epidemic, ensuring a place for LGBTQ people to access information, care and support they were not receiving elsewhere. Now the largest LGBT multi service organization on the East Coast, The Center sees more than 6,000 weekly visitors and hosts over 400 community group meetings each month. The Center has a solid track record of working for and with the community to increase access to a diverse range of high-quality services and resources, including our substance use recovery programming for adults and youth; HIV/AIDS programming; youth programs; and our families and opportunities work.

#### The Center's services

The Center fosters a welcoming environment where everyone is celebrated for who they are. We offer the LGBTQ communities of NYC advocacy, health and wellness programs; arts, entertainment, and cultural events; recovery, parenthood, and family support services. In addition, The Center has made racial equity a keystone element of our approach to community building.

- **Counseling and support groups:** The Center provides short-term individual counseling and referral services, as well as hosts a range of support groups for our transgender and gender nonconforming communities. Both individual counseling and groups offer support around a variety of topics, including gender identity and expression, emotional challenges, substance use and recovery, and aim to build peer support networks.
- **Employment support:** Despite legal protections in New York State, the effects of discrimination continue to place trans and gender nonconforming communities at extremely high rates of poverty, unemployment, underemployment and homelessness. The Center provides services to directly combat this inequality, including individual career coaching support, case management, events focused on career exploration, legal workshops and networking opportunities.
- Health insurance enrollment and linkage to care: The Center is a designated navigator agency for the NY State of Health, the health insurance marketplace for New York through the Affordable Care Act. We provide information and education on the options available, and help individuals, families, small businesses and their employees enroll in New York State Medicaid, The NY Essential Plan, Child Health Plus and Qualified Health plans. We also help connect individuals to TGNCNB affirming medical and behavioral healthcare as needed.

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# THE CENTER

- **HIV prevention, testing, and linkage to care:** We offer counseling for individuals, groups, couples and families, plus a variety of events, speakers and informal social gatherings for positive people and their loved ones. This includes HIV & AIDS education, anonymous testing, counseling and support, partner notification, and linkage to medical treatment including PEP, PrEP, and antiretroviral medications.
- **Legal services:** The Center partners with community-based legal providers to provide TGNCNB community members with drop-in assistance around gender-affirming access to healthcare, insurance, employment issues, housing, name and gender marker changes, public benefits and more.

#### **On Children & Youth**

At The Center, we believe that all LGBTQ+ youth deserve to celebrate who they are, what makes them unique, and why they matter. We provide a safe, inclusive, affirming environment where LGBTQ+ youth can connect with peers, build leadership skills, and take care of their mental and physical health.

Youths ages 13-22 are welcome to participate in our in-person and virtual programs, services, and events. Everything we offer is free and confidential. [Additional offerings exist for community members outside of this age range as well.]

Our program offerings for youth are wide-ranging and include access to a youth-specific Drop-in Center, leadership opportunities, paid internships, scholarships, summer camp, and more. Additionally, youth are connected to peers from across the city who engage in our programming and help support a sense of community for young people navigating complex, and sometimes difficult, dynamics at home and school.

More and more, young people need supports that are outside of school to compliment the classroom environment, and to support their development. We request that the Council support increases to pivotal youth programs in the FY25 budget, in addition to supporting existing youth-related Council initiatives.

For over three decades, The Center has worked to ensure that the LGBT community of New York City has access to the highest quality and most diverse range of services and resources. Though we are living in a time of unprecedented social, legal and political acceptance of the LGBTQ community, there is still much work to be done on a local and state level to ensure that our community members can successfully combat the social and economic injustice they face daily. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony today on an issue of great importance city-wide. We look forward to continue working with you to ensure New York City's future as a safe space for all New Yorkers.

#### THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER 208 W 13 ST NEW YORK, NY 10011

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To: New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth From: Ellinor Rutkey, Esq., The Door's Legal Services Center Re: Preliminary Budget Hearing: Children and Youth

### Date: March 22, 2024

The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization that has been supporting vulnerable youth in New York City since 1972. Each year, we provide services to nearly 9,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 24, many of them immigrants. The services we provide include healthcare, education, supportive housing, food and nutrition, career development, arts and recreation, mental health counseling, and legal assistance — all under one roof. We are also a Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth drop-in center, providing food, clothing, showers, laundry, and case management services to young people who are unhoused or unstably housed. At The Door, we emphasize empowering and engaging the young people we serve, and we are committed to creating a safe, equitable, and inclusive space for young people and staff.

The Legal Services Center at The Door is an office of over 50 individuals, including attorneys, social workers, and support staff. We specialize in serving vulnerable children and young people, including many clients who are unhoused, undocumented, and/or LGBTQIA+. Our attorneys represent youth in removal proceedings before immigration courts, as well as those seeking to regularize their status through the filing of affirmative humanitarian applications. In the fiscal year 2023, we handled 3,282 immigration matters for young people. We also operate several free legal clinics, including a weekly drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth.

#### I. The Need for More Youth Shelter Beds

### i. Benefits of Youth Shelters

In New York City, unhoused youth ages 16 through 24 rely on the DYCD youth shelter system for lifesaving services. Within the DYCD shelter system, these young people are offered both a safe place to live and wraparound services to help stabilize their lives. Youth living in a youth shelter have access to necessary supports, including mental health care, career and education support, medical care, and case management services. They also have access to a plethora of daily activities, ranging from art classes to pickup sports games. Further, but no less importantly, young people within the DYCD shelter system live among their peers. This provides a greater sense of safety and belonging than if the young person had to live among adults within the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system.

#### ii. Insufficient Capacity Within the DYCD Youth Shelter System

Despite the myriad of benefits offered to young people within the DYCD system, many unhoused youth ages 16 through 24 are not currently residing in youth shelters. Over the last two years, demand for youth shelters has skyrocketed. This increase in demand comes largely from the high number of recent immigrants to New York – many of whom are eligible to live in



a youth shelter. However, there is a significant dearth of shelter beds within the DYCD system.<sup>1</sup> On a daily basis, staff members on our legal services team at The Door speak with youth who have been unable to secure a bed in the youth shelter system. Many of these young people have tried repeatedly to find a bed without any success, constantly visiting and calling shelters in hopes that one will have a vacancy.

If a young person does manage to find a bed in a youth shelter, it is likely due to sheer luck. DYCD providers are so overwhelmed with the demand for shelter that eligible young people are not even being added to a waiting list for a bed – they are simply being turned away. As a result, no amount of patience or time will result in a young person receiving a youth shelter placement.

Given the simultaneous unprecedented demand for youth shelter beds and the extreme shortage of those beds, an alarming number of unhoused young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are being placed in Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs) instead of youth shelters. These young people are eligible for placement in both the DYCD youth shelter system and the HERRC system because of their age. Although youth placed in HERRCs are legal adults, the fact that they are being placed in a HERRC rather than in a youth shelter is cause for serious concern.

### iii. Young People Placed in HERRCs

First, young people being placed in HERRCs are in extremely vulnerable positions. Many of them have only just arrived in the United States after a perilous, long, and often traumatic journey from their countries of origin. Even before setting out on that journey, many of these young people have already experienced significant trauma in their lives.

For example, at a recent drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth, Door staff members spoke with a 20-year-old who was unable to find a bed in a youth shelter. He had come to the United States after traveling by plane, bus, and by foot from his home country in North Africa. The young person had made the difficult decision to leave his home country after rebel forces broke into his family's home, raped his sister, and beat his brother to death before his eyes.

Other young people we meet have experienced significant trauma due to familial abuse, neglect, or abandonment. For example, at the same drop-in clinic for runaway homeless youth, Door staff members also spoke with an 18-year-old who is currently living in a HERRC. He had made a similarly arduous journey to the United States from his home country in West Africa. This young person decided to leave his home country after years of being hit, whipped, and physically abused by his father. He hopes to attend school in New York – something he had been unable to do in his home country, as his father forced him to work on a farm rather than attend school starting at age 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Gwynne Hogan, Youth Shelter System Locks Out Hundreds as Migrants Seek Entry, The City (Mar. 12, 2024, 5:00 AM), https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/?oref=nyn\_firstread\_nl.



This history of trauma is not the only reason why the young people being placed in HERRCs are so vulnerable. These young people are also vulnerable because they have essentially no support – in any form – here in New York. For one, many young immigrants do not know any Americans when they arrive in the United States. When Door staff members ask these young people about trusted adults that they can turn to for support in New York, the young people almost always tell us that there is no such person in their lives. These young people are thus forced to navigate a new country and culture by themselves and to be their own advocate in the face of barriers. This – coupled with the fact that many of these young people also do not speak English proficiently, and that many have significant gaps in their formal education – makes it exceedingly difficult for young people to access the supports they need if they are placed in a HERRC. Moreover, these young people have essentially no money, and thus, no way to purchase necessary goods and services. And because the young people placed in HERRCs all recently arrived in the United States, most will not be eligible to obtain employment authorization for at least several months – and likely, much longer.

### iv. HERRCs Are Inappropriate Environments for Young People

HERRCs are not appropriate environments for these vulnerable young people. While DYCD youth shelters are supportive and welcoming environments for young adults, HERRCs are inhospitable and alienating. With thousands of people staying in makeshift tent cities, HERRCs offer little to no privacy for their occupants. This lack of privacy can be especially difficult for young people who need solitude and isolation to process complex trauma. HERRCs also are open to people of all ages, meaning that young people in HERRCs often find themselves among much older adults rather than fellow teenagers and young adults. As a result, many young people say that they have not formed any sort of relationship with their fellow HERRC residents. An additional reason why HERRCs are not appropriate environments for vulnerable young people is that HERRCs do not supply sufficient food to their occupants. Young people consistently report to Door staff members that they are given barely any food at their HERRCs. While food is a necessity for all people living in shelter, consistent access to nutritious and plentiful food is particularly important for young people whose essential organs, including their brains, are still developing.

Further, HERRCs deprive young people of the opportunity to find safety and stability in New York. For the last few months, young people living in HERRCs have been subject to the unlawful and inhumane 30-day shelter rule.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these rules and actions, every 30

https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/nyscef/ViewDocument?docIndex=mMvlTZFjq\_PLUS\_X/RU7jGZrf4Q==.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> On March 15, 2024, the Legal Aid Society announced that it had reached a settlement with the City that would impact the length of time that new New Yorkers are able to remain in shelter. Under the settlement agreement, young people under the age of 23 will be forced to leave their shelter after 60 days rather than 30 days. *See* Mia Hollie & Annie McDonough, *City Hall and Legal Aid Society Settle Right to Shelter Case*, City & State New York (Mar. 15, 2024), https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2024/03/city-hall-and-legal-aid-society-settle-right-shelter-case/394996/. While 60-day placements are certainly preferable to 30-day placements, this settlement does not prevent vulnerable young people from being forced to leave their shelter placements. An additional change under last week's settlement is that HERRC residents may request to remain in their shelter placement at the end of their 30- or 60-day stay, rather than be forced to leave. Stip., ¶ 24, *Callahan v. Carey*, No. 42582/1979 (NY Sup Ct New York Cnty 2024),



days, the young person must uproot their life and find somewhere new to live – without the support of a trusted adult, without money, and usually, without proficiency in English. Moreover, some young people report being given only a few days' notice that they will need to leave their HERRC, which has caused these young people great fear and panic.

These constant evictions, and the threat thereof, make it all but impossible for young people to develop a sense of stability in New York. Young people living in HERRCs report that it is hard for them to make friends and form support networks. It is also hard for these young people to take advantage of community-based resources, like mutual aid groups that distribute food and clothes. By the time that a young HERRC resident learns about a resource in their community, they will only be able to make use of it for at most a few weeks before they are forced to leave that community. Moreover, constant evictions under the 30-day shelter rule make it very difficult for young people to stay in school, which is particularly worrisome when so many of these young people have already experienced interruptions in their formal education.

Unsurprisingly, this indefensible policy has also resulted in many young people sleeping on the streets or otherwise becoming unsheltered. At The Door, staff members regularly speak with young people who have been removed from their existing HERRC placement and have not been able to find anywhere else to stay. It goes without saying that this is extremely dangerous for impacted young people and completely unacceptable as a matter of policy.

If these young people had instead received a bed in a DYCD youth shelter, they would not be subject to the City's cruel 30-day rule. Rather, following their shelter stay, they would be supported in transitioning to a Transitional Independent Living (TIL) program for up to two years. Thus, for a young person, placement in a HERRC means a cycle of constant evictions, whereas placement in a DYCD youth shelter means long-term services and support.

More broadly, the services offered to young people in HERRCs pale in comparison to those offered to young people in DYCD youth shelters. While young people in HERRCs receive meagre meals and a cot on which to sleep, young people in DYCD youth shelters receive numerous supportive services tailored to their needs. Young people in youth shelters are equipped with the tools that they need to thrive, whereas young people in HERRCs are provided with barely enough to survive.<sup>3</sup> It is absolutely necessary that the City provide more youth shelter beds to house and support newly arrived young people.

### II. The Need for Immigration Legal Services for Newly Arrived Young People

However, these requests will only be granted in the event of "extenuating circumstances," and the person making the request has an obligation to "take all appropriate affirmative steps to resettle in housing opportunities outside of City Shelters." *Id.* at ¶¶ 22, 24, App'x A. Particularly for young people who lack a support system and a strong grasp of English, these requirements may prove too burdensome. As a result, vulnerable young people may be disproportionately unlikely to be permitted to remain in shelter at the end of their 30- or 60-day placement. Moreover, it is unclear exactly when or how these new policies will be implemented.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Giulia McDonnell Nieto Del Rio, NYC Shelter Evictions Keep Migrant Youth From Vital Resources, Documented (Feb. 16, 2024), https://documentedny.com/2024/02/16/shelter-evictions-nyc-migrants-

 $minors/?utm\_source=ActiveCampaign&utm\_medium=email&utm\_content=Early+Arrival\%3A+Shelter+evictions+keep+youth+from+resources&utm\_campaign=Newsletter022124+Definitive++DNAInfo.$ 



### i. Legal Services Providers Are at Capacity

Legal services providers in New York City have never been able to fully meet the demand for free immigration legal help. Though the need for these services is great, there has always been a shortage of free immigration lawyers in the City. Over the last two years, non-profit immigration legal service providers have only become more strained, as the number of individuals seeking these services has skyrocketed and organizations are still dealing with many older cases delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic court closures. Every day at the Door, staff members turn away young immigrants seeking legal support and representation. In the month of February 2024, we received over 50 requests for immigration legal help, and we are on track to receive even more requests in March. Our partners representing youth and adult immigrants in New York face this same challenge – we are nearly all at capacity.

In February 2023, The Door's Legal Services Center formally closed immigration intake to focus on its heavy case load and a waitlist of roughly 400 young immigrants in need of legal assistance. After spending the summer working with our pro bono partners to reach all the young people on our waitlist, we reopened intake at the end of 2023. In the few short months that our intake has been open, we have already added 71 young people eligible for immigration relief to our waitlist and have turned countless more away. Over 100 are still waiting for an initial legal screening appointment.

Moreover, our weekly drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth has been busier than ever. In the past, the clinic saw zero to one person each week. Now, clinic staffers routinely speak with up to a dozen people over the course of an hour, nearly all of whom are new immigrants looking for immigration legal services. The need and demand for services grows every week and we do not have enough capacity to keep up.

#### ii. The Importance of Free Legal Services for Young Immigrants

Now more than ever, it is vital that young immigrants receive free and competent legal services. Door staff members have noticed that immigration hearings are being scheduled particularly quickly, leaving young people with even less time than usual to find a lawyer. Given these time constraints, and the overall shortage of free immigration lawyers, many young immigrants have been entirely unable to find legal assistance.

Even many of the young people who have managed to meet with a lawyer have been disadvantaged due to the shortage of free legal service providers. For example, Door staff members have spoken with young people who turned 21 years old several months after arriving in the United States. If those young people had found a lawyer immediately upon arriving in the country and before turning 21, some could have successfully petitioned for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) – a pathway to legal status that requires that the applicant be under 21 years old. In this way, long waiting times can result in a young person missing their opportunity to apply for certain forms of relief.



Further, a great proportion of those young people have strong legal cases. Many of the young people that The Door turns away should ultimately be found eligible for legal relief, including SIJS and asylum. Without a lawyer, though, it can be difficult – or even impossible – for a young person to successfully self-petition for relief.

The risks to a young person who is not able to find a lawyer are significant. First, the majority of the young people who have requested legal help at The Door are in removal proceedings, meaning that they risk being removed to the very country that they fled to get here. As discussed, these young people are often fleeing horrific situations, and for many, being returned to their home country could be deadly.

While there are resources available to young immigrants who are unable to find lawyers, these are insufficient. For example, resources like the Red Cross Asylum Application Help Center are not equipped to provide young people with the level of support they need to navigate their immigration cases. Although these resources can help young people to submit immigration applications, they are not equipped to provide support to young immigrants before or after the application is filed. And particularly for young people involved in immigration court, legal support that falls short of full representation is simply not adequate – especially when these young people are at risk of being removed from the United States. Young immigrants need comprehensive legal services, and it is necessary for the City to provide funding to hire more immigration lawyers.

#### **III.** Conclusion

Young people experiencing homelessness need access to the safety, stability, and services offered in youth shelters. If the City does not increase funding for the DYCD shelter system, already-vulnerable youth will be left to navigate a constant cycle of evictions and the difficulties of young adulthood – all without any meaningful source of support. Thus, I urge New York City to fund additional DYCD youth shelter beds.

Young people without legal status also need access to free immigration legal services. If the City does not provide funding to remedy the current shortage of legal services providers, an unacceptable number of young people who are eligible for immigration relief will not receive necessary legal help. The probable result is that many of these young people will be ordered removed to a country where their wellbeing – and sometimes, lives – will be at risk. Therefore, I urge New York City to fund youth-specific, no-cost immigration legal services.

Thank you.

Ellinor Rutkey, Esq. Legal Fellow The Door's Legal Services Center



# The New York City Council Committee On Children and Youth Chair: Council Member Althea V. Stevens

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, The Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028, and The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

> Testimony of The Legal Aid Society Community Justice Unit

March 22, 2024

Presented by:

Anthony Posada Supervising Attorney Community Justice Unit Criminal Law Reform The Legal Aid Society 49 Thomas Street 10th Floor New York, NY 10013 On behalf of The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU), I want to thank the Committee on Children and Youth and the Chair Council Member Althea Stevens for holding this critical hearing on the budget for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). My testimony today focuses on DYCD's decision to cut funding from CJU's legal service programs for cure violence participants and their families, and why that decision risks undoing the cure violence model's progress in reducing gun violence in our communities.

### I. THROUGH ITS WORK SUPPORTING THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN REDUCING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

The Cure Violence/Crisis Management System (CMS),<sup>1</sup> launched by the City Council in 2012, delivers a multiagency approach to reducing gun violence in New York City. Cure Violence is a community-based violence interruption model to reducing shootings that treats gun violence as an infectious disease. It employs credible messengers from the community as violence interrupters and outreach workers to detect and stop conflicts before they escalate, to identify and help highrisk individuals, and to change the community's social norms with respect to gun violence. CMS encompasses the Cure Violence program and related programs that offer legal services, youth employment opportunities, school-based conflict mediation, mental and physical health services, and other social support services.<sup>2</sup>

CJU was established in 2012 as part of the CMS model by the City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence.<sup>3</sup> CJU adopts the Cure Violence philosophy – that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement – and provides comprehensive legal services to CMS partners, participants, and community members to reduce gun and gang violence in their neighborhoods. We offer direct representation to thousands of New Yorkers experiencing legal emergencies. CJU's comprehensive legal services empower at-risk youth and their families to navigate criminal, housing, immigration, and any other legal issues that require assistance so they can improve their circumstances. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2023 Report.

In addition to legal counsel, CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and trainings at over 40 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve. *Id.* CJU staff and attorneys hold community events across all five boroughs, including Know Your Rights events, rallies, and educational clinics. *Id.* To help combat youth's early involvement in the criminal justice system, CJU's community organizers lead several Know Your Rights trainings and workshops. *Id.* For example, CJU leads a Youth Ambassador Training where youth learn how to organize their communities and teach other community

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Neighborhood Investments and Public Safety, New York City Council, available at

https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/#:~:text=Cure%20employs%20credible%20messengers%20from,with%20respect %20to%20gun%20violence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Report of the Finance Division, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, March 19, 2020, *available at* <u>098-MOCJ.pdf</u> (nyc.gov).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, available at <u>https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/.</u>

members about their legal rights when interacting with police. CJU also leads cure violence workshops at schools and at our CMS partner sites throughout the city.

Through these comprehensive legal services, CJU works to defend, educate, and organize community members. CJU's defense services include running a critical 24/7 hotline for legal emergencies, such as arrests and housing evictions, helping individuals obtain their rap sheets and seal their criminal records, and assisting New Yorkers with employment and family law issues. We educate community members on their rights to help them navigate legal systems and to access vital services that respond to their legal and social service needs. And we organize community members to harness community power and mobilize communities to advocate for resources and social justice. As a result of our work, community members receive legal services that they otherwise might not be able to access, and those services directly contribute to their improved circumstances and safer communities. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2023 Report.

Our services help stop the spread of gun violence and improve people's circumstances in numerous ways, so I want to highlight three specific examples that illustrate the essence of our services:

- A program manager from one of our Queens CMS/CV partners contacted us about a community member experiencing a mental health problem who was in their home threatening to use a gun unless they were left alone. The program manager was afraid that the situation would escalate if the NYPD were called, resulting in an imminently deadly threat to that community member. Our team immediately advocated for the vulnerable person by connecting them to Legal Aid's Director of Social Services who quickly connected with them and offered direct social services that calmed the person and deescalated the situation.
- We received a hotline call from our CMS/CV partner from Staten Island informing us that a CMS employee passed away and that the decedent's sister, who was also a CMS employee, was arrested because she was desperately trying to see her brother. A flood of NYPD motorized units from the 120th Precinct unnecessarily descended upon this Black and Brown community of Staten Island despite the deceased person having passed away due to natural causes. Our CJU attorneys were immediately able to call the precinct and invoke the sister's right to counsel so that she would not be questioned without an attorney present. At the same time, since Legal Aid is also the primary provider of public defense services in the city, we were able to connect her with one of Legal Aid's trial attorneys so they could quickly represent her and obtain her release.
- We reached hundreds of community members in a three-month education program that went directly into underserved communities to provide wrap-around legal services. We did this by partnering with a CMS/CV organization using their trauma mobile to educate community members on how they could access their rap sheets and learn whether they are eligible for sealing of their convictions. During this outreach, we conducted legal intakes to connect people to our legal services including immigration, housing, employment, and family law. We reviewed all the rap sheets we received with the support of our Case Closed project that helps New Yorkers seal their criminal convictions. Community members

received follow-up calls from our staff members informing them of the outcome of their rap sheet review and notifying them of their sealing eligibility. Criminal convictions close vital opportunities for underserved communities such as housing, employment, and financial aid, so this program was critical for our community members.

### II. CUTTING THE FUNDING OF THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT UNDERMINES THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM'S EFFORTS TO ERADICATE GUN VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

While Mayor Adams' administration has committed to investing an additional \$8.5 million in CMS, it has also committed to cutting the funding of CJU's supportive legal services by \$1.5 million. This proposed cut to CJU's funding is a disinvestment in underserved communities, particularly underserved youth, because CJU's services target those vulnerable communities. Because CMS will be expanding to 40 sites operating in 31 neighborhoods boroughwide, there is a greater demand for CJU's legal wrap-around services.

Despite the mayor's recent public comment that the crisis management team has done a "great job,"<sup>4</sup> the administration's proposed cuts to CJU's funding will undermine the crisis management work to reduce violence. All the organizations that founded the CMS movement in our city, the same ones that continue to work together that keep our communities safe, agree that funding CJU is critical to ensuring the success of their work to reduce gun violence. *See* Exhibit B, Letters of Support from CMS Organizations. As those organizations explain in the attached letters of support: by providing community members with comprehensive legal services, CJU has helped grow the number of participants in cure violence interruption programs and improved the lives of participants and their families. *Id*. Those organizations all count on CJU's legal services to support their mission to eradicate gun violence and to meet the community's needs. *Id*.

CJU's services are vital to the cure violence work. Members of the Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) and the Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), which is responsible for overseeing the contracts of CMS providers, recently attended one of CJU's legal education workshops. Following the workshop, they all agreed that CJU's legal services make up an essential component to the CMS effort to increase public safety in our communities.

The CMS/CV model has proven to be remarkably effective at keeping our communities safe. Recent data from the NYC Council Data Team showed that "precincts that received a Cure [program] experienced a 18.1% reduction in shootings in the first year of the program. Additionally, we find a 16-19% reduction in the years after that, demonstrating the longevity of this change."<sup>5</sup> A 19% reduction in shootings means that lives were saved. But this administration's decision to defund CJU's work could cripple the CMS/CV network by cutting off comprehensive legal services for New York City's vulnerable communities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In-Person Media Availability of Mayor Eric Adams, *available at* 

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0EH5KVCkbQ (discussing crisis management at the 40-minute mark).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> NYC Council Data Team, Cure Violence Programs in NYC, available at <u>https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/</u>.

#### **III.INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PAYS DIVIDENDS BECAUSE IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS.**

Funding CJU is an investment in communities that are in crises. And that investment pays dividends because CJU has proven to be able to serve more communities in ways that directly contributes to the public safety of our city. In FY23, CJU provided 7,045 legal services, including 5,378 services to Cure Violence partner organizations and 1,667 to non-affiliated community members throughout New York City. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2023 Report. These numbers include over 500 services to Project Hope and Project Reset. During FY23, CJU also organized 140 events, including various community town halls led by the Gun Violence Task Force regarding Mayor Adams's Community Safety Plan, a continuation of the Blueprint to End Gun Violence, which focuses on prevention and intervention strategies using public health and community development models to address the root causes of gun violence. CJU also held rallies for our clients and communities to exercise their civic duty through our "Your Vote Matters Symposium." The event saw many of our partner organizations come together to discuss the significance of voting, the impact of criminal disenfranchisement, and how we can strengthen our neighborhoods.

As successful as FY23 was, CJU has provided 4,074 services for the first 6 months of FY24. *Id.* If that trend continues, CJU is on track for around a 15% increase in legal services. CJU's increase in legal services means more underserved communities – experiencing over-policing, unstable housing, limited employment opportunities, and an overall lack of adequate services – can address their basic needs.

#### **Conclusion**

Our communities thrive when they can access comprehensive legal services that improve their lives. To invest in community safety, particularly among youth in underserved communities, the City should restore CJU's funding so we can continue providing critical legal services to communities and support the crisis management work to reduce gun violence.

# Exhibit A

# **COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT**

The Community Justice Unit's (CJU) dedicated and client-centered practice model is instrumental in supporting the goal of the New York City's Crisis Management System of eradicating gun-violence with a community-based public health model. The CJU provides essential wrap-around services to play an integral role in the community-led violence interruption model by enabling healthier and safer communities. CJU's services allow atrisk youth and their families to navigate criminal, housing, immigration, and any other legal issues that require assistance, so they can improve their circumstances.

# Creating Healthy and Safe Communities

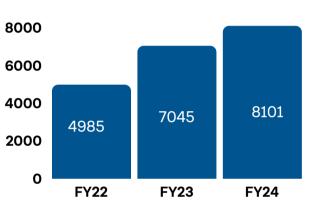
The CJU offers essential legal services to New Yorkers across our city, including helping individuals obtain their rap sheets and seal their criminal records, offering legal advice, assisting New Yorkers with housing issues, and running a 24/7 hotline for legal emergencies. In addition, CJU staff hold community events across all five boroughs, including Know Your Rights (KYR) events, rallies, and educational clinics.

# Our Service Locations



# Services Provided by Fiscal Year

10000



Note: FY24 services are estimated based on the projected 15% increase of services in Q1 and Q2

# Our Impact

Between July 1, 2022 and December, 31, 2023, The Legal Aid Society



Served clients residing in every city council district



Held 165 events



Received over 9 million impressions for the "Your Rights, Your Power" campaign



Provided 11,119 services to CJU clients and community members

Note: The map and below graphs and charts include 18 months of services - July 1, 2022 - Dec, 31, 2023



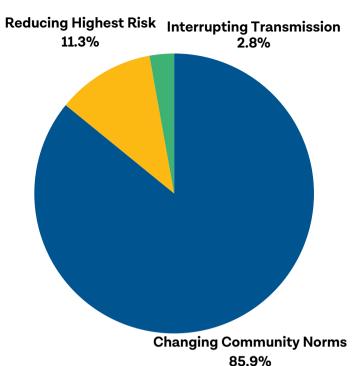
Contact Us

Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney, Criminal Defense Practice email: jmluongo@legal-aid.org phone: (646) 668-0325

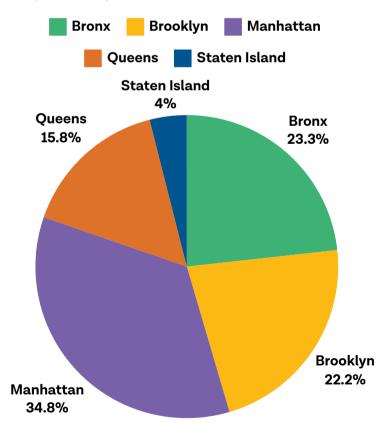
# Reducing Gun Violence and Increasing Community Engagement

The Community Justice Unit (CJU) provides comprehensive legal services to New York City's Crisis Management System (CMS) and Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). We adopt the Cure Violence (CV) philosophy - that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement. Our work empowers communities impacted by gun violence to develop proactive strategies to reduce violence through providing holistic legal representation to the underserved communities of New York City. In addition to legal counsel, the CJU conducts extensive community outreach.

# Services Provided by CV Model Type



# Percentage of Services Provided by Borough



# **Examples of Our Services**

Legal services are provided at CV sites, including Man Up, True 2 Life, and Brownsville In, Violence Out (BIVO).



KYR workshops are provided to support individuals during police encounters.



Ensuring records are sealed if clients are eligible to help prevent illegal discrimination from potential employers.

Community building events promote a culture of positive community norms to reduce gun and gang violence.

Responses to neighborhood violence and shootings provide immediate resources and supports, including "credible messengers" and various other violence interrupters.





**Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney, Criminal Defense Practice** email: jmluongo@legal-aid.org phone: (646) 668-0325

# Community Justice Unit Services by City Council District

City Council District	FY23 Services (Full Fiscal Year)	FY24 Services (Q1 & Q2 Only)	Total Services Provided Past 18 months
1	270	476	746
2	73	161	234
3	182	221	403
4	50	66	116
5	17	12	29
6	231	39	270
7	70	66	136
8	670	325	995
9	147	113	260
10	57	76	133
11	33	79	112
12	61	32	93
13	57	40	97
14	178	70	248
15	296	75	371
16	155	131	286
17	398	231	629
18	170	37	207
19	10	18	28
20	11	12	23
21	10	30	40
22	34	144	178
23	7	13	20
24	148	21	169
25	47	24	71
26	389	23	412
27	39	19	58
28	378	26	404
29	18	15	33
30	19	10	29
31	48	34	82
32	8	30	38
33	58	60	118
34	31	38	69
35	125	419	544
36	135	111	246
37	30	58	88
38	419	142	561
39	32	18	50
40	29	16	45
41	64	95	159
42	90	59	149
43	99	4	103
44	19	10	29
45	46	13	59
46	25	3	28
47	112	20	132
48	18	10	28
49	258	130	388
50	12	6	18
51	7	3	10
Unknown / Other	1155	190	1345
Grand Total	7045	4074	11119

# Community Justice Unit Services by Partner Organization

Partner Organization	FY23 Services (Full Fiscal Year)	FY24 Services (Q1 & Q2 Only)	Work Services Provided Over The Past 18 months
Center for Justice Initiatives: Midtown	1102	1283	2385
Project Reset	526	466	992
Osborne Association	550	0	550
Red Hook Initiative	384	136	520
Center for Justice Initiatives: Downtown	297	215	512
Save Our Streets	285	215	500
True2Life	350	136	486
Community Capacity Development	164	305	469
100 suits	309	21	330
Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence	283	21	
Center for Community Alternatives			285
Life Camp	219	65	284
•	270	1	271
Project Hope	201	57	258
Until Freedom	200	0	200
Bronx Defenders	64	89	153
Man Up!	48	58	106
Release the Grip (Bronx Connect)	101	0	101
Street Corner Resources	87	0	87
Guns Down Lives Up	26	56	82
Brownsville In, Violence Out	14	66	80
Stand Up to Violence	80	0	80
Jails Voting Initiative	0	73	73
GANGS Coalition	53	10	63
King of Kings	48	14	62
Exodus Transitional Community	55	0	55
Operation HOOD	54	1	55
Developing Righteous United Movements	41	0	41
Dock Street Academy	36	0	36
NAACP Legal Defense Fund	36	0	36
Gangsta's Making Astronomical Community Changes	34	0	34
St. Nick's Alliance	0	34	34
Jails Action Coalition	0	30	30
Urban Neighborhood	26	0	26
The Wick	1	24	25
Rock Safe Streets	9	15	24
Young New Yorkers	24	0	24
Kramer Levin	24	0	24
Staten Island Justice Center	19	0	19
Safe Space		0	
Freedom Agenda	18	0	18
Ingersol houses	14	0	14
Brooklyn School for Career Development	12	0	12
	0	11	11
East Harlem Tutorial	10	0	10
Immigrant Defense Project	0	10	10
United Activities Unlimited	10	0	10
Elite Learners	5	0	5
East NY Tutorial	3	0	3
Central Family Life Center	2	0	2
Sheltering Arms	2	0	2
Fortune Society	1	0	1
N/A	206	155	361
Other (includes CJU events such as voter registration,			
school career days, ralleys, and days of action)	746	526	1272
Grand Total	7045	4074	11119

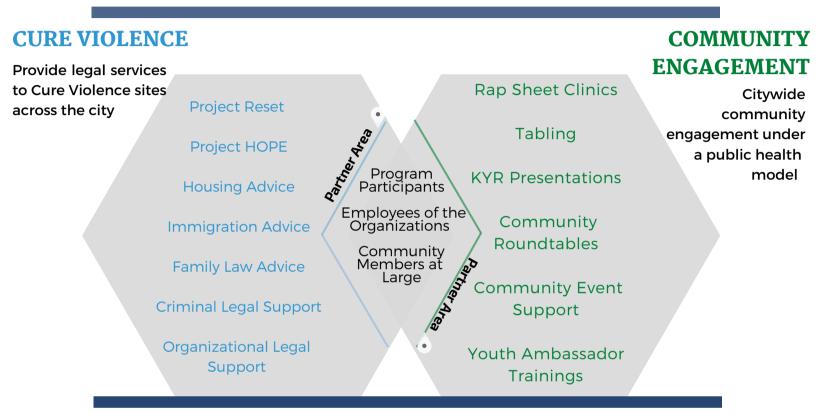
THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY CRIMINAL DEFENSE

# THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT

JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023

199 Water Street New York, NY 10038 212-577-3300 https://legalaidnyc.org

The Community Justice Unit (CJU) provides comprehensive wrap-around legal services to New York City's Crisis Management System (CMS). We adopt the Cure Violence philosophy - that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement. Our work empowers communities impacted by gun violence to develop proactive strategies to reduce violence through providing holistic legal representation to underserved communities throughout the five boroughs of New York City. In addition to legal counsel, the CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and Know Your Rights trainings at over 30 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve.



# **IMPLEMENTING THE CV MODEL**

### **Interrupting Transmission**

### MODEL GOALS:

Prevent Retaliations; Mediate Conflicts; Keep Conflicts Cool

# CJU ROLE:

Provide support to CV partner agencies and participants intermediary role between communities and law enforcement

# **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Safe Surrenders 24/7 Hotlines Emergency Legal Support **Reducing Highest Risk** 

# MODEL GOALS:

Assess Highest Risk; Change Behavior; Provide Treatment **CJU ROLE**:

Vertical Representation Model; Connect CV partner agencies, community members and participants to social/legal services

# **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Rap Sheet Clinics Job Fairs/Employment Training Access to Benefits (Housing, Disability, Education, Healthcare) Case Closed - Record Sealing Immigration Issues Court Information/Legal Advice

# **Changing Community Norms**

# **MODEL GOALS:**

Respond to Shootings; Organize Community; Spread Positive Norms

# CJU ROLE:

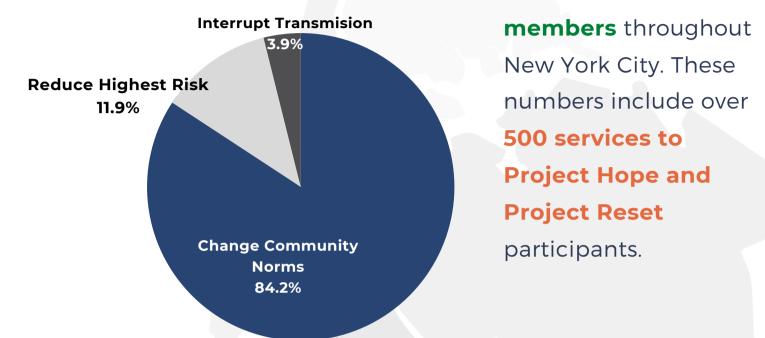
Amplify Community Voices; Challenge policies negatively impacting communities (e.g. MJ reform, gang database)

# **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Shooting Responses Know Your Rights Events Community Events (Tabling) Policy Advocacy/Reform Awareness Campaigns Pathways to College Gun Violence Awareness OUR SERVICES

Over the course of FY23, the CJU had a total of **7,045 services** including: **5,378** services to **Cure Violence** partner organizations and **1,667** to non-affiliated **community** 

PAGE 3



HOSTED 140 COMMUNITY EVENTS

\_\_\_\_\_

- Gun Awareness Campaigns
- Gang Database workshops
- Other Virtual Events

**957** 

# OUR SERVICE POPULATION

Including, but not limited to:

- Know Your Rights trainings
- Legal Clinics
- Voting Information Events

4024

# **COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

**2064** Participants



# **OUR ADVOCACY**



The two pictured here are from the Dock Street Middle School for STEAM Studies in Brooklyn (top) and Guns Down Life Up in the Bronx (right). In order to help combat youth's early involvement in the criminal justice system, CJU's Community Organizer's led a number of Know Your Rights trainings and workshops.





The CJU has been hard at work this fiscal year, rallying our clients and community to exercise their civic duty and cast their vote. Our very own Community Organizer spearheaded the "Your Vote Matters Symposium." The event saw many of our partner organizations

come together for a discussion on the significance of voting, the impact of criminal disenfranchisement, and how we can come together to strengthen our neighborhoods.

Throughout the year, the CJU participated in many of the community town halls led by the Gun Violence Task Force. These conversations were used to help generate Mayor Adams' "Community Safety Plan"; a continuation of Blueprint to End Gun Violence. The plan focuses on prevention and intervention strategies using public health and community development model to address the root causes of gun violence.

PAGE 5

# FY 23 CURE VIOLENCE HIGHLIGHTS



Cardi B announced a new partnership with Cure Violence (CV) site, Community Capacity Development (CCD).

After years of delay and pushing from the CJU and various other CV organizations, the Office of Inspector General finally released its report on the NYPD's use and operation of the criminal group database.



THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY CRIMINAL DEFENSE

# THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT

JULY 1, 2023 - DECEMBER 31, 2023

199 Water Street New York, NY 10038 212-577-3300 SAFE

https://legalaidnyc.org

#### PAGE 2

The Community Justice Unit (CJU) provides comprehensive wrap-around legal services to New York City's Crisis Management System (CMS) and Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). We adopt the Cure Violence philosophy - that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement. Our work empowers communities impacted by gun violence to develop proactive strategies to reduce violence through providing holistic legal representation to underserved communities throughout the five boroughs of New York City. In addition to legal counsel, the CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and Know Your Rights trainings at over 30 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve.



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# **MODEL GOALS**

Assess Highest Risk; Change Behavior; Provide Treatment

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Vertical Representation Model; Connect CV partner agencies, community members and participants to social/legal services

# SERVICES PROVIDED

Rap Sheet Clinics Job Fairs/Employment Training Access to Benefits (Housing, Disability, Education, Healthcare) Case Closed - Record Sealing Immigration Issues Court Information/Legal Advice

# **Changing Community Norms**

# MODEL GOALS

Respond to Shootings; Organize Community; Spread Positive Norms

# CJU ROLE

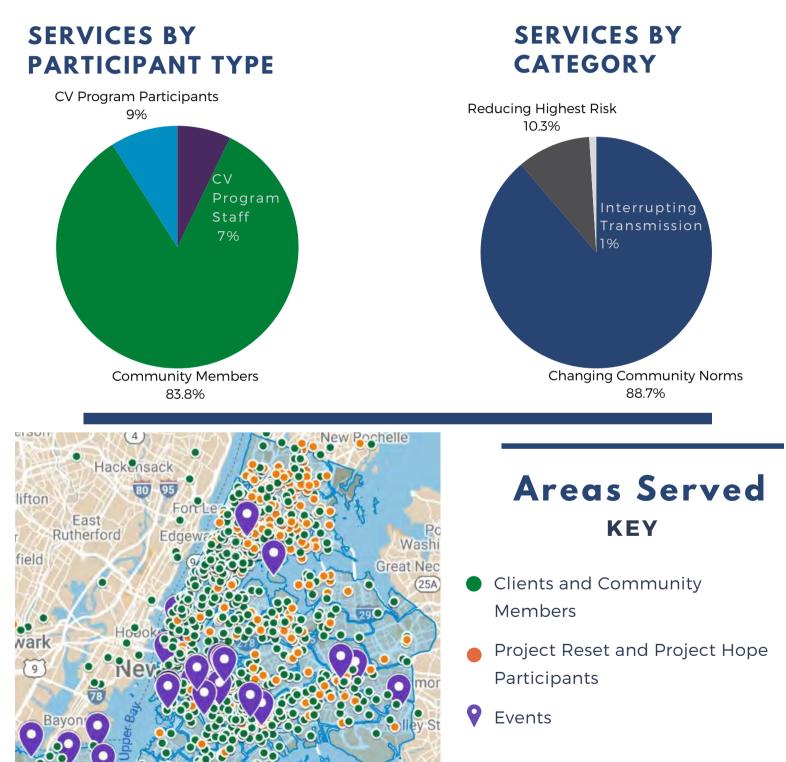
Amplify Community Voices; Challenge policies negatively impacting communities (e.g. MJ reform, gang database)

# SERVICES PROVIDED

Shooting Responses Know Your Rights Events Community Events (Tabling) Policy Advocacy/Reform Awareness Campaigns Pathways to College Gun Violence Awareness

# **OUR SERVICES**

The **CJU** provided a total of **4074 services** including: **367** services to members of **Cure Violence** partner organizations and **3840** services to nonaffiliated **community members** throughout New York City. These numbers include **523 Project Reset and Project Hope** participants. **CJU events** supported **1940 individuals.** 



## OUR ADVOCACY

Over 1.6 million fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds from throughout New York City have engaged with the CJU's "Your Rights, Your Power" campaign. Launched in 2023 in part to educate New Yorkers about their rights during police encounters, this campaign had the highest engagement rate among fifteen to seventeen-year-olds!





They learned about organizing in their communities and teaching

Multiple cohorts of teens attended our Youth Ambassador Trainings.



other community members about their legal rights when interacting with police.



CJU Lead Community Organizer Takeasha Newton attended Governor Hochul's signing of the Clean Slate Act, which brings critically needed relief to individuals who experience discrimination because of criminal convictions. CJU members attended the Communities Not Cages Advocacy Day in Albany. More than 300 New Yorkers from across the state gathered to advocate for sentencing reform bills aimed at confronting New York's crisis of mass incarceration.



# Exhibit B



227 12A Merrick Blvd Laurelton NY 11413 646.618.9797 100SuitsNYC@gmail.com

March 19, 2024

Hon. Eric Adams New York City Mayor

Hon. Adrienne E. Adams New York City Council Speaker

Dear New York City Mayor and Speaker:

On behalf of 100 Suits, we write to thank you for your support of our work in the Crisis Management System/Cure Violence model and ask that you ensure that such support includes expanding funding, not reducing it, for The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU). The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model, and the proposed cuts to CJU's budget will undermine our work to reduce violence in the community.

The CJU was established in 2012 as part of the New York City CMS/CV model by the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence. In its recommendations, the Task Force noted that "legal support will help at-risk youth and their families navigate different issues...Families might also have housing, family and immigration issues that they need assistance with in order to move or otherwise improve their circumstances." The legal support CJU provides has played an integral role in the success of our community violence interruption model. By providing community members with comprehensive legal services, CJU has helped us grow the number of participants in our violence interruption programs and it has improved the lives of participants and their families. To enable healthier and safer communities, participants and their families must continue to have access to these vital legal services in and around our catchment areas.

CJU's legal education clinics have empowered thousands of New Yorkers in high schools, community organizations, and even in jails. CJU supports healthier communities by educating people on their rights in the criminal and civil contexts, demystifying legal systems, and explaining how to access legal services effectively. These clinics make the critical difference between someone being a statistic or being empowered when they find themselves in a police encounter or other legal matter. With more CV site participants, the demand for such clinics has risen. But because of the Department of Youth and Community Development's decision to cut its funding, CJU's capacity to deliver vital services to our communities will be depleted.



227 12A Merrick Blvd Laurelton NY 11413 646.618.9797 100SuitsNYC@gmail.com

As part of the CMS/CV model, we are committed to continuing to work with CJU and believe their dedicated and comprehensive client-centered practice is the most effective approach to supporting us in the mission to eradicate gun violence using the community violence intervention model. CJU is integral to our ability to effectively address the needs and demands of those before the courts and in the community. With Mayor Adams' recent announcement of the "partnership" and "pouring money" into CMS, which places the CMS sites at the center of the City's strategy to prevent gun violence, we must be able to count on CJU's legal services to meet the community's needs.

We call on you to restore CJU's funding that has been taken away due to the Department of Youth and Community Development's budget cuts and to increase CJU's budget so its capacity to deliver comprehensive legal services grows as the CMS/CV model also grows.

Sincerely,

Yours in service Mr. Kevin Livingston Founder, President, & CEO 100 Suits for 100 Men



646-618-9797

100SuitsNYC@gmail.com 100SuitsNYC.org



LIFE Camp, Inc 111-12 Sutphin Boulevard Jamaica, NY 11435 (646) 258-0936 www.peaceisalifestyle.com



March 19, 2024

Hon. Eric Adams New York City Mayor Hon. Adrienne E. Adams New York City Council Speaker

Dear New York City Mayor and Speaker:

On behalf of Life Camp, we write to thank you for your support of our work in the Crisis Management System/Cure Violence model and ask that you ensure that such support includes expanding funding, not reducing it, for The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU). The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model, and the proposed cuts to CJU's budget will undermine our work to reduce violence in the community.

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Sincerely,

S

Erica Ford CEO LIFE Camp, Inc.

March 20, 2024

Hon. Eric Adams New York City Mayor

Hon. Adrienne E. Adams New York City Council Speaker

Dear New York City Mayor and Speaker:

On behalf of the Operation H.O.O.D. (Helping Our Own Develop), we write to thank you for your support of our work in the Crisis Management System/Cure Violence model and ask that you ensure that such support includes expanding funding, not reducing it, for The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU). The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model, and the proposed cuts to CJU's budget will undermine our work to reduce violence in the community.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, available at, <u>https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/.</u> <sup>2</sup> Id., at 15.

But because of the Department of Youth and Community Development's decision to cut its funding, CJU's capacity to deliver vital services to our communities will be depleted.

As part of the CMS/CV model, we are committed to continuing to work with CJU and believe their dedicated and comprehensive client-centered practice is the most effective approach to supporting us in the mission to eradicate gun violence using the community violence intervention model. CJU is integral to our ability to effectively address the needs and demands of those before the courts and in the community. With Mayor Adams' recent announcement of the "partnership" and "pouring money" into CMS, which places the CMS sites at the center of the City's strategy to prevent gun violence, we must be able to count on CJU's legal services to meet the community's needs. <sup>3</sup>

We call on you to restore CJU's funding that has been taken away due to the Department of Youth and Community Development's budget cuts and to increase CJU's budget so its capacity to deliver comprehensive legal services grows as the CMS/CV model also grows.

Sincerely **Derick Latif Scott** 

Operation H.O.O.D, Founder/Program Director

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> NYC Mayor's Office, Mayor Eric Adams Holds In-Person Media Availability, YouTube (March 12, 2024), <u>https://www.youtube.com/live/X0EH5KVCkbQ?si=OJ157WTnuWtUF8WS</u>.



March 20, 2024

Hon. Eric Adams New York City Mayor

Hon. Adrienne E. Adams New York City Council Speaker

Dear New York City Mayor and Speaker:

On behalf of Man Up! Inc. we write to thank you for your support of our work in the Crisis Management System/Cure Violence model and ask that you ensure that such support includes expanding funding, not reducing it, for The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU). The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model, and the proposed cuts to CJU's budget will undermine our work to reduce violence in the community.

The CJU was established in 2012 as part of the New York City CMS/CV model by the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence.<sup>1</sup> In its recommendations, the Task Force noted that "legal support will help at-risk youth and their families navigate different issues...Families might also have housing, family and immigration issues that they need assistance with in order to move or otherwise improve their circumstances."<sup>2</sup> The legal support CJU provides has played an integral role in the success of our community violence interruption model. By providing community members with comprehensive legal services, CJU has helped us grow the number of participants in our violence interruption programs and it has improved the lives of participants and their families. To enable healthier and safer communities, participants and their families must continue to have access to these vital legal services in and around our catchment areas..

CJU's legal education clinics have empowered thousands of New Yorkers in high schools, community organizations, and even in jails. CJU supports healthier communities by educating people on their rights in the criminal and civil contexts, demystifying legal systems, and explaining how to access legal services effectively. These clinics make the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, available at, <u>https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/.</u> <sup>2</sup> Id., at 15.



critical difference between someone being a statistic or being empowered when they find themselves in a police encounter or other legal matter. With more CV site participants, the

demand for such clinics has risen. But because of the Department of Youth and Community Development's decision to cut its funding, CJU's capacity to deliver vital services to our communities will be depleted.

As part of the CMS/CV model, we are committed to continuing to work with CJU and believe their dedicated and comprehensive client-centered practice is the most effective approach to supporting us in the mission to eradicate gun violence using the community violence intervention model. CJU is integral to our ability to effectively address the needs and demands of those before the courts and in the community. With Mayor Adams' recent announcement of the "partnership" and "pouring money" into CMS, which places the CMS sites at the center of the City's strategy to prevent gun violence, we must be able to count on CJU's legal services to meet the community's needs.<sup>3</sup>

We call on you to restore CJU's funding that has been taken away due to the Department of Youth and Community Development's budget cuts and to increase CJU's budget so its capacity to deliver comprehensive legal services grows as the CMS/CV model also grows.

Sincerely,

Sharlene Nash-Pryor, MPH Director of Operations 797/799 Van Siclen Ave. Brooklyn NY 11207 Phone: (718) 498-2320 Email: Snash-Pryor@manupinc.org Website: www.Manupinc.org

<sup>3</sup> NYC Mayor's Office, *Mayor Eric Adams Holds In-Person Media Availability*, YouTube (March 12, 2024), <u>https://www.youtube.com/live/X0EH5KVCkbQ?si=OJ157WTnuWtUF8WS</u>.



March 19, 2024

Hon. Eric Adams New York City Mayor

Hon. Adrienne E. Adams New York City Council Speaker

Dear New York City Mayor and Speaker:

On behalf of Street Corner Resources, Inc, we write to thank you for your support of our work in the Crisis Management System/Cure Violence model and ask that you ensure that such support includes expanding funding, not reducing it, for The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU). The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model, and the proposed cuts to CJU's budget will undermine our work to reduce violence in the community.

The CJU was established in 2012 as part of the New York City CMS/CV model by the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence.<sup>1</sup> In its recommendations, the Task Force noted that "legal support will help at-risk youth and their families navigate different issues...Families might also have housing, family and immigration issues that they need assistance with in order to move or otherwise improve their circumstances."<sup>2</sup> The legal support CJU provides has played an integral role in the success of our community violence interruption model. By providing community members with comprehensive legal services, CJU has helped us grow the number of participants in our violence interruption programs and it has improved the lives of participants and their families. To enable healthier and safer communities, participants and their families must continue to have access to these vital legal services in and around our catchment areas..

CJU's legal education clinics have empowered thousands of New Yorkers in high schools, community organizations, and even in jails. CJU supports healthier communities by educating people on their rights in the criminal and civil contexts, demystifying legal systems, and explaining how to access legal services effectively. These clinics make the critical difference

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, available at, <u>https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/.</u> <sup>2</sup> *Id.*, at 15.

between someone being a statistic or being empowered when they find themselves in a police encounter or other legal matter. With more CV site participants, the demand for such clinics has risen. But because of the Department of Youth and Community Development's decision to cut its funding, CJU's capacity to deliver vital services to our communities will be depleted.

As part of the CMS/CV model, we are committed to continuing to work with CJU and believe their dedicated and comprehensive client-centered practice is the most effective approach to supporting us in the mission to eradicate gun violence using the community violence intervention model. CJU is integral to our ability to effectively address the needs and demands of those before the courts and in the community. With Mayor Adams' recent announcement of the "partnership" and "pouring money" into CMS, which places the CMS sites at the center of the City's strategy to prevent gun violence, we must be able to count on CJU's legal services to meet the community's needs. <sup>3</sup>

We call on you to restore CJU's funding that has been taken away due to the Department of Youth and Community Development's budget cuts and to increase CJU's budget so its capacity to deliver comprehensive legal services grows as the CMS/CV model also grows.

Sincerely,

Maurice Lacey – LMSW, MS Ed Social Work Coordinator Credible Clinician

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> NYC Mayor's Office, *Mayor Eric Adams Holds In-Person Media Availability*, YouTube (March 12, 2024), <u>https://www.youtube.com/live/X0EH5KVCkbQ?si=OJ157WTnuWtUF8WS.</u>

### We see what can be.



March 20, 2024

New York City Commissioner Keith Howard Department of Community and Youth Development 2 Lafayette Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor New York, New York 10007

Dear Commissioner Howard:

On behalf of our Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence program (B.R.A.G.), I am writing to ask that you restore the <u>November Plan Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG)</u> to the Office of Neighborhood Safety in the amount of \$5.471 Million in Fiscal Year 2025 and the out years.

I am especially concerned about the cuts to The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU) and how this will impact our ability to support youth. The Crisis Management System/Cure Violence (CMS/CV) work relies on providing community members with comprehensive legal services to our growing network of participants within the CMS/CV model. The legal support CJU provides has played an integral role in the success of our community violence interruption model. By providing community members with comprehensive legal services, CJU has helped us grow the number of participants in our violence interruption programs and it has improved the lives of participants and their families. To enable healthier and safer communities, participants and their families must continue to have access to these vital legal services in and around our catchment areas.

CJU's legal education clinics have empowered thousands of New Yorkers in high schools, community organizations, and even in jails. CJU supports healthier communities by educating people on their rights in the criminal and civil contexts, demystifying legal systems, and explaining how to access legal services effectively. These clinics make the critical difference between someone being a statistic or being empowered when they find themselves in a police encounter or other legal matter. With more CV site participants, the demand for such clinics has risen. But because of the Mayor's decision to cut its funding in the November Plan, CJU's capacity to deliver vital services to our communities will be depleted.

As part of the CMS/CV model, we are committed to continuing to work with CJU and believe their dedicated and comprehensive client-centered practice is the most effective approach to supporting us in the mission to eradicate gun violence using the community violence intervention model. CJU is integral to our ability to effectively address the needs and demands of those before the courts and in the community. With Mayor Adams' recent announcement of the "partnership" and "pouring money" into CMS, which places the CMS sites at the center of the City's strategy to prevent gun violence, we must be able to count on CJU's legal services to meet the community's needs. <sup>1</sup>

Once again, I call on you to restore CJU's funding and to examine CJU's budget so its capacity to deliver comprehensive legal services grows as the CMS/CV model also grows. Please be in touch if you have any questions at (212) 243-7070.

Sincerely,

michelle yanche

Michelle Yanche Chief Executive Officer

CC: Deputy Mayor Ana Almanzar Honorable Adrienne E. Adams, Speaker, New York City Council Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair, New York City Council Children and Youth Committee

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> NYC Mayor's Office, *Mayor Eric Adams Holds In-Person Media Availability*, YouTube (March 12, 2024), https://www.youtube.com/live/X0EH5KVCkbQ?si=0J157WTnuWtUF8WS.



### **TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK**

### New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025

### New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair

### Submitted by: Ariel Savransky, UJA-Federation of New York

### March 22, 2024

Thank you, Chairperson Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth Services, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Ariel Savransky, and I am a Senior Advocacy and Policy Advisor at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates over \$180 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

### Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Nonprofit Human Services Providers

UJA and our partners thank the City Council for the \$100 million workforce investment over the last two years and the \$50 million investment next year. We are also grateful to the City Council and Administration for agreeing to invest an additional \$741 million in New York City's human services workforce by committing to fund a 3% cost-of-living adjustment for FY 25 through FY 27.

A COLA is a significant step towards addressing the historic underfunding and lack of investment in the human services sector, as these workers do some of the most important jobs in our communities yet are underpaid and undervalued. As government is the predominant funder of human services through government contracts, this has resulted in nearly 25% of all human services workers qualifying for food stamps in 2016-2018. Low wages also have a sweeping effect on workplace conditions and the outcome of programs, with high staff turnover and vacancy rates resulting in heavy and unsustainable workloads.

Years of underfunding of the sector have resulted in the human services workforce being some of the lowest compensated workers in New York City's economy. These are workers who do some of the most important jobs in our communities; they take care of our aging neighbors, assist families in staying in their homes, provide workforce training, work with people to overcome substance abuse and addiction, and help people from all walks of life in the event of an emergency. The City COLA announcement is a step in the right direction of ensuring city-contracted human services workers are paid fairly.

### Reverse the Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) for COMPASS and Summer Rising Programs

The Mayor's FY25 Preliminary Budget proposes a \$26.54 million PEG for COMPASS and Summer Rising Programs. This PEG includes a \$6.9 million cut to COMPASS after school programs decreasing access to these programs for 3,538 total youth. If this cut remains in place, two nonprofits in UJA's network will lose funding for 72 youth to attend their after school programs. One of these programs has a waitlist; both provide services to communities that have limited access to other affordable after school options. It is unclear what families will do if these after school supports are cut. A \$19.64 million cut was also proposed for Summer Rising which would result in middle school students attending the program only 4 days a week (Monday through Thursday) until 4pm each day. Families rely on Summer Rising to keep their children engaged and safe while they work. A 4pm dismissal for middle school students will result in families having to scramble to find alternative care for their children. No programming on Fridays will mean middle school students will not be able to have field trips which exposed them to places and experiences not offered in their immediate neighborhoods.

This PEG comes at a time when communities need these services the most. According to the Citizens' Committee for Children, 80% of New York City families cannot afford child care or after school programs.<sup>1</sup> The inability to secure child care resulted in a loss of \$23 billion in economic activity in New York City in 2022. It is clear, families need more support not less to remain in New York City and thrive. **UJA urges the Adams'** Administration to reverse the \$26.54 million PEG to COMPASS and Summer Rising programs and to invest in programs that are serving youth and strengthening communities across New York City.

### **Strengthening Youth Programs**

Nonprofits in UJA's network oversee COMPASS and/or SONYC after school programs throughout New York City, Beacons in Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx, and Cornerstones in Staten Island and the Bronx. In recent years, low wages for staff led to recruitment and retention challenges at these programs. Delays in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) comprehensive background check process have made it increasingly difficult to onboard staff quickly and efficiently. And lastly, decreased enrollment in programs due to COVID impacted rates of participation in programs. When rates of participation increased, these programs struggled to have enough staff to serve participants due to the combination of low wages and delayed background checks plaguing the youth services workforce.

The following investments must be made in these programs to ensure the fiscal stability of these programs:

- Increase the cost-per-participant rate in COMPASS, SONYC and Beacon contracts to set a wage floor of \$22 per hour for employees, so that providers can offer a more competitive wage to combat recruitment challenges. This rate is in line with wages for similar positions at the Department of Education.
- Increase Cornerstones' budgets to cover the costs associated with operating programs in NYCHAowned spaces and ensure equal pay for Cornerstone staff doing similar work to Beacon and SONYC and COMPASS staff. Reexamine the current funding formula for Cornerstone, which is insufficient to cover staffing and program costs, forcing many providers to offer programming through "in kind" contributions from other programs.
- Provide greater transparency on how Cornerstone rates are calculated and the average cost-perparticipant rate so providers and advocates can work with DYCD to improve the formula to ensure it covers the true costs of running these programs.

COMPASS and SONYC programs have also not been re-procured in many years, leaving providers with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation. Providers are expecting DYCD to reissue an RFP in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> From Birth to Age 12: The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City | CCC New York

2024. It must address the true cost of providing high quality after school programming. Mechanisms to do this include:

- Establishing year-round, twelve-month youth service contracts and streamlining the procurement process.
- Ensure that after school program enrollment is controlled locally by community-based organizations and not centralized by DYCD.
- Ensure that after school programs are paid on time and efforts to catch up on payments owed from previous fiscal years are immediately prioritized.
- Release a new RFP for the SONYC and COMPASS contracts that include:
  - Paying approved providers indirect rates in full, in accordance with the City's Indirect Cost Rate Initiative. Providers must also be able to claim those rates at the outset and include them in budgets, not have a placeholder rate that later gets amended.
  - Including annual funding for cost escalators in contracts, in accordance with inflation.
  - Supporting staffing ratios appropriate for School Age Child Care (SACC) licensing for all 12 months of the year.

COMPASS, SONYC, Beacon and Cornerstone programs continued to provide services to children, youth and adults during challenging times for both employees and participants. Investments must be made to strengthen these programs, so they are prepared for future challenges.

### **Comprehensive Background Checks**

Staffing is one of the main components that children and youth programs require to be successful. Specifically, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) need to not only recruit staff to work in their programs, but they also need to hire these individuals in a timely manner. Part of the hiring process for CBOs operating under Schoolage Child Care (SACC) licenses requires staff to undergo comprehensive background checks.

In September 2019, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) required new comprehensive background checks for staff and volunteers in youth and early childhood education programs. The background checks are required by rules in the Federal Childcare and Community Development Block Grant that was reauthorized and revised in 2014. As the local regulator, the background check process is managed in New York City by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

DOHMH struggled to manage the process effectively causing delays in the hiring process for staff members in early childhood education and afterschool programs. The length of time between submitting clearance paperwork and the clearances being completed by DOHMH took anywhere between two weeks and six months and was impacted by the time of year clearances were submitted. Communication with DOHMH was also challenging. When providers sent inquiries about the status of pending background checks to the DOHMH they often receive delayed responses with little information or worse no responses at all. In some instances, providers reported receiving notifications of successfully completed background checks up to six months after they were completed by the DOHMH.

The challenges with the comprehensive background check system were acknowledged in the *Blueprint for Child Care and Early Childhood Education in New York City*<sup>2</sup> noting specifically that any delay in the background check process disrupts child care. The Adams' Administration ultimately committed to hiring forty additional employees at DOHMH to support the comprehensive background check process in addition to "automating the processing system". DOHMH launched the online system to submit background checks on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/office-of-the-mayor/2022/Childcare-

Plan.pdf#:~:text=The%20Blueprint%20for%20Child%20Care%20and%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20cuts,City's%20most%2 0in%20need%20families.

May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. The ability to upload documents to an online platform instead of emailing them is a welcome change and being able to check the status of applications online has been incredibly helpful to providers. It currently takes approximately 45 days for background checks to be completed-much less time than the months providers used to have to wait. There have been some challenges with the transition to the new system. For example, providers were told originally by DOHMH that clearances submitted prior to May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 would not have to be submitted again after the launch of the automated system on May 22nd. DOHMH eventually rescinded this rule and asked providers to re-submit all clearances to the online system. Recently, some staff were notified directly and not their employer when their comprehensive background check was expiring, encouraging them to complete the appropriate paperwork and get fingerprinted in the next 14 days. Notification like this must be received by both the employee and employer.

UJA believes that in order for the comprehensive background check process to continue to improve, DOHMH must have enough staff to oversee the online system and to work with providers who experience issues. DOHMH should continue to commit to improving the background check process, decreasing the timeframe to complete checks and to notify providers and staff within 48 hours when background checks have been completed.

### **Summer Rising Issues**

Nonprofits will once again be overseeing the afternoon enrichment sessions during Summer Rising 2024. A few things need to be addressed to ensure a smoother implementation of this program for both the CBOs overseeing it and the children and youth engaging in Summer Rising.

In previous summers, CBOs had no control over the enrollment in their Summer Rising programs. CBOs were told to accept all children and/or youth who showed interest in participating in their programs, even when many programs were at capacity. In other instances, once programs began and children and youth who were registered did not show-up, CBOs could not fill vacant spots with individuals who were interested in attending their program and were unable to register originally. Children and youth who attend school year programming at CBOs were unable to get into Summer Rising programs hosted by the same CBOs, forcing many to attend programs located far from their homes with staff they had no previous relationship with. Transportation was also not guaranteed for many Summer Rising participants meaning families had to find ways to get their children to sites that were often located far from where they live.

CBOs also had little control over the Summer Rising programs they were managing. New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) was the lead city agency overseeing Summer Rising implementation. Just getting questions answered regarding operational issues from NYCPS was extremely challenging resulting in many CBOs feeling like they received little to no support when they needed it. Community based organizations were often placed in schools they previously never ran programs in. This resulted in providers both having to become accustomed to a new space when they were designing their activities as well as having to interact with principals, they had no prior relationship with.

CBOs also felt that they were inadequately prepared and supported to engage participants with disabilities. First, CBOs did not have access to IEPs and received little information on the needs of the participants with disabilities who attended their programs. Updated medical forms were not shared for any of the participants, meaning details like participants' food allergies were not reliably communicated to community based organizations. DOE paraprofessionals were supposed to be available during the enrichment part of the day, but CBOs had no protocol to follow when paraprofessionals were not available to work with participants who needed them. Lastly, CBOs found many paraprofessionals reluctant to listen to guidance from the CBOs and in many instances simply challenging to work with. This summer, CBOs must have control over participant registration and be able to maintain their own rosters. Controlling their own rosters will allow CBOs to understand who is and is not attending their program and possibly offer a slot that is not being used to someone else. Whenever possible, CBOs should be placed with schools they already have a relationship with. If CBOs are placed with schools, they do not have a relationship with, these placements should be made as soon as possible to give CBOs enough time to familiarize themselves with the school and the community they will be serving. Lastly, increased coordination and support is needed for participants with disabilities to ensure a successful and meaningful summer for these students. Community based organizations are committed to providing a high-quality summer program to children and youth in New York City. However, the previous issues must be addressed to offer the providers the support they need to accomplish this task.

### ADULT LITERACY

### **Increase investment in Adult Literacy Programs**

As you know, DYCD currently has an open RFP that will fund community-based organizations to lead adult basic education, high school equivalency, and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs for the next three to six years. DYCD has structured this RFP to prioritize residents of the highest poverty, lowest educational attainment, most limited English proficient neighborhoods in the city. UJA unequivocally supports this goal. Unfortunately, the way DYCD has structured the RFP through a two-tier funding competition could effectively render up to 70% of the current community-based adult literacy providers non-competitive, forcing them to close their classes and displace thousands of the very students that DYCD is aiming to serve. UJA is grateful to the City Council members who signed on to the letter urging DYCD to revise this counterproductive competition model and to extend the proposal deadline. The irony is that, while DYCD wants to address neighborhoods with the highest needs, the \$11.85 million in funding in this RFP is \$5 million less than the \$16.83 million in administration-side funding for DYCD Adult Literacy contracts in FY24. This means that this RFP will serve just over 9,100 students annually, a significant decrease from the 16,000 plus that DYCD reported serving in FY23, and less than half of 1% of the 2.2 million adult New Yorkers in need.

At the same time, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY25 includes \$21.7 million for DYCD Adult Literacy, nearly \$10 million – or 85% - more than what is currently included in the RFP. If this additional funding could get baselined and included in the RFP, DYCD could do some combination of the following three things:

- Increase the per student funding rate, which would make it more realistic for smaller programs/organizations – those that don't have additional sources of revenue to supplement the DYCD funding – to apply under this RFP and to be able to provide more comprehensive services.
- 2) Increase the number of Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) designated for funding and increase the number of students served through this RFP.
- 3) Create a second, non-NTA based competition for providers who wish to run boroughwide and/or citywide programs and increase the number of students served through this RFP.

UJA thanks DYCD for further extending the RFP deadline to April 5<sup>th</sup> but urges the Council to get clarity on the funding and push for a baselining of the full \$21.7 million, as well as to continue to push to fix the competition model.

A substantial investment in adult literacy education means that more New Yorkers will have the capacity to access better jobs and organize for better wages and working conditions; more parents will be able to advocate for their children and their families; more New Yorkers will speak up for their rights and participate in the democratic process; and more communities will be healthier and safer. For these reasons, UJA urges the Administration and the Council to consider the proposed recommendations.

### **Conclusion**

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist New York City's most vulnerable and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, please contact me at savranskya@ujafedny.org.



Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses Before the New York City Council

### FY 2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Children & Youth Services Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair

#### Submitted by Nora Moran, Director of Policy & Advocacy March 22nd, 2024

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nora Moran, and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Youth programming has played a significant role throughout the history of New York City by engaging young people in programming that can expand their minds and opportunities, connecting families to other essential supports beyond after school, and helping youth navigate challenging times. Summer programming, including summer camps and the Summer Youth Employment Program, has long been the cornerstone of the positive youth development movement, offering exciting and supportive programs outside of the September-June school structure. It is crucial that New York City maintain and invest in its summer programs not only to offer youth and their caregivers safe spaces to be in the summer, but also to maintain the positive development, enrichment, and most importantly fun that comes with summer programs.

The Mayor's FY25 Preliminary Budget proposes <u>a \$44.9 million program to eliminate the gap</u> <u>(PEG)</u> for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Leading up to the FY25 Preliminary Budget proposal, the Adams Administration cited economic uncertainty to justify a round of PEGs to City agencies. However, analyses from New York State Comptroller

DiNapoli and the Independent Budget Office (IBO) have called into question the need for budget cuts, given an anticipated surplus of more than \$2 billion.<sup>1 2</sup>

The Mayor has reversed a handful of previously established PEGs from November 2023 for agencies such as DOE and NYPD, but has maintained all budget cuts for DYCD, and, in fact, announced new cuts in January's FY25 Preliminary Budget. DYCD's PEG will directly and indirectly impact the broad array of community-based programs supported by the agency. This PEG comes at a time when communities need services the most as our city faces an affordability crisis for families and. The Mayor's Management Report issued in January 2024 notes increased program utilization across many DYCD programs in FY24,<sup>3</sup> calling any proposed cuts-however they are framed-into question. This \$44.9 million PEG must be restored in the FY25 Executive Budget. Instead of cutting this network of supports for our youth and families, we should be strengthening and expanding it, as well as creating further linkages between program models to ensure that the vast array of services are readily available to all New Yorkers. Instituting funding cuts to DYCD at a time when working families are faced with a crisis of unaffordability and the city has seen an influx of new families in need of supportive services is a grievous misstep and calls into question this administration's commitment to both our young people and their families.

This testimony will focus on recommendations to support and stabilize citywide youth services and strengthen the human services workforce including:

- Restore \$6.9 million to COMPASS Explore and SONYC afterschool programs;
- Restore \$19.6 million in Summer Rising funding to prevent the reduction of middle school programs;
- Baseline \$21.7 million in Adult Literacy funding and ensure all funding is included in the current RFP;
- Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative;
- Baseline the Promise NYC program with a \$20 million annual investment;
- Reduce barriers preventing asylum seeking families from accessing youth-serving programs;
- Invest in the human services workforce and make a long-term investment by creating and funding a prevailing wage schedule.

#### **Restore \$6.9 Million to COMPASS Explore and SONYC Afterschool Programs**

COMPASS/SONYC programs provide afterschool and summer programming to school-aged youth across the city. Settlement houses collectively operate 140 school-based after-school programs. COMPASS/SONYC programs have struggled in recent years with low staff wages leading to recruitment and retention challenges, as well as vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process. Now that schools are consistently open and youth are engaging with in-person activities again, it's important to protect and invest in afterschool programs to ensure they have the staff and resources they need to support young New Yorkers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/print-2024-preliminary-budget-report-february.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-16-2023.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2024/dycd.pdf

Unfortunately, the PEG from the November 2023 Plan proposed a \$6.9 million cut to afterschool programs. In January 2024, CBOs started receiving notices of cuts (described as "slot reductions") to their FY25 SONYC<sup>4</sup> contracts. Simultaneously, COMPASS Explore<sup>5</sup> providers received notice that their contracts would be permanently ended on June 30, 2024, after their current one-year extension contract expires.

This will result in the loss of 3,538 afterschool seats and the shrinking of the citywide afterschool system. In light of growing demand for childcare services and the persistent lack of affordable care options for working families, this cut will be devastating for the families of New York City.

### In the FY25 budget, the City must restore \$6.9 million in afterschool funding by extending the COMPASS Explore contracts, and restoring cuts to SONYC programming.

Furthermore, COMPASS/SONYC programs have not been re-procured in many years, leaving providers with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation or changes in the labor market. The upcoming RFP must reflect the true cost of providing high quality afterschool programming. In November 2023, UNH released a report that details this issue and includes model budgets for city-funded afterschool programs.<sup>6</sup> Our recommendations include:

- Establishing year-round, 12 month youth service contracts and streamlining the procurement process;
- Paying approved provider indirect rates in full, in accordance with the City's Indirect Cost Rate Initiative;
  - Providers must be able to claim those rates at the outset and include them in budgets, not have a placeholder rate that later gets amended;
- Funding the true cost of afterschool programming and establishing a \$22 an hour wage floor
  - Contracts should also include year-over-year funding cost escalators, in accordance with inflation;
- Supporting staffing ratios appropriate for School Age Child Care (SACC) licensing for all 12 months of the year; and
- Prioritizing positive youth development principles.

To support the new RFP, the City Council should invest \$3 million in a new Youth Mental Health Council Initiative to provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs, allowing them to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs (see below for more information).

Finally, we urge DYCD to work with providers to develop a plan for serving youth with disabilities in COMPASS/SONYC programs. Recommendations include:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The SONYC model serves grades 6-8. Middle school youth are engaged in rigorous afterschool activities, structured as clubs, emphasizing student voice and choice.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The COMPASS Explore model serves grades K-12 students. This unique model allowed providers to develop specialized programming to engage youth in experiential learning opportunities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> UNH, Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City, November 2023

https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991824/True\_Cost\_of\_Aftersc hool\_November\_2023%281%29.pdf?1702991824

- Providing funding for paraprofessional support and allow that paraprofessional staff to report directly to CBO staff;
- Enable CBOs to hire experts and trainers in multiple modalities of learning to support Education Specialists and other existing staff;
- Give program staff access to assistive technologies (and training on how to use them) like communicators (including speech-to-text devices), computer access tools, hearing and visual aids, and more present in their community centers; and
- Issue clear protocols for CBOs to seek out support when integrating a youth with a disability and have programs available to refer these youth to if the current arrangement is not fulfilling that young person's needs.

### Restore \$19.6 Million in Summer Rising Funding to Prevent the Reduction of Middle School Programs

DYCD has confirmed that Summer Rising, the partnership between DYCD and the DOE to provide integrated summer school and summer camp to elementary- and middle-school aged youth, will continue in Summer 2024. Despite several years of feedback where CBOs have raised challenges with this model-including issues with centralized DOE enrollment; a lack of choice for parents and families who wanted a more traditional summer camp experience; and inconsistent support for students with disabilities-there have been few clear changes or improvements made.

Despite these challenges, CBOs have worked hard to implement strong Summer Rising programs. However, the Adams Administration has proposed a \$19.6 million PEG to DYCD's Summer Rising budget. If maintained, this cut will result in a drastic reduction to programming for middle school students this summer - a complete cut to Friday programming and a 2-hour reduction to the remaining program days. This equates to a proposed loss of 18 hours of programming per week.

### The City must restore \$19.6 million in Summer Rising funding to restore middle school programs.

In addition, in order to make this model successful for all parties, but especially for children and families who deserve summer opportunities that fulfill their needs, the City must consider the following:

- DYCD and DOE should jointly invest in a comprehensive evaluation to determine the efficacy of the model;
- CBOs must have control over participant registration, which will especially help families who need additional digital and language support to apply for programming,
  - CBOs should be able to maintain their own rosters so that if there are young people who cannot attend the CBO portion of the day, CBOs have the power to unenroll that youth and give that slot to a young person who can attend so the slot does not go to waste;
- The City should allow youth and families to choose whether to attend summer school, camp, or both, and allow CBOs the chance to record how many young people choose which service; and

• In addition, Summer Rising 2024 can only be set up for success if there is increased and coordinated support for students with disabilities and students in temporary housing to make sure CBOs have resources they need to properly serve these young people.

### Baseline \$21.7 million in Adult Literacy funding and ensure all funding is included in the current RFP

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

Today in New York City, there are nearly one million adults living in New York City with limited to no proficiency in English (i.e. those who reported that they did not speak English or did not speak English well). Moreover, over the past year, more than 170,000 asylum seekers and refugees have arrived in New York after fleeing life-threatening social, political, and economic conditions in their home countries. For many of these adults, limited skills impact almost every aspect of their lives, making it difficult to support their children in school, access health care, secure and maintain living-wage jobs, advocate for their rights, and fully participate in their new communities.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) currently has an open Request for Proposal (RFP) that will fund community-based organizations to lead adult basic education, high school equivalency, and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs for the next three to six years. DYCD has structured this RFP to prioritize residents of the highest poverty, lowest educational attainment, and most limited English proficient neighborhoods in the city. While we commend and support this goal, the way DYCD has structured the RFP through a two-tier funding competition could effectively render up to 70% of the current community-based adult literacy providers non-competitive, forcing them to close their classes and displace thousands of the very students that DYCD aims to serve. We appreciate Chair Avilés, Council Member Won, Council Member Stevens, and the 38 members of the City Council who signed on to your letter that urges DYCD to reverse this counterproductive competition model and extend the proposal deadline.

UNH recognizes DYCD's efforts to increase adult literacy services in areas of New York City that may never have had them before, but we cannot do that at the expense of the current students utilizing these programs. In light of increasing demand for literacy services, especially with new asylum seekers in New York City, we must focus on growing the system overall rather than rearranging resources. Instead of placing an outsized emphasis on geography, we hope that DYCD considers program location as a piece of the overall evaluation so that program quality can be considered as well. And in the long term, we must focus on ensuring access for all adult learners who need support.

While DYCD wants to address neighborhoods with the highest needs, the \$11.85 million in funding in this RFP is \$5 million less than the \$16.83 million in administration-side funding for DYCD Adult Literacy contracts in FY24. This means that this RFP will serve just over 9,100 students annually, a significant decrease from the 11,000 – 16,000 that DYCD has reported over the past few years.

At the same time, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY25 includes \$21.7 million for DYCD Adult Literacy, nearly \$10 million – nearly 85% – more than what is currently included in the RFP. If this additional funding could get baselined and included in the RFP, we ask the City Council to call on DYCD to take action through some combination of the following steps:

- Increase the per student funding rate, which would make it more realistic for smaller programs/organizations – those that don't have additional sources of revenue to supplement the DYCD funding – to apply under this RFP and to be able to provide more comprehensive services.
- 2. Increase the number of Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) designated for funding and increase the number of students served through this RFP.
- 3. Create a second, non-NTA based competition for providers who wish to run borough-wide and/or city-wide programs and increase the number of students served through this RFP.

With the April 5th deadline for organizations to submit proposals fast approaching, <u>we urge this</u> <u>Committee to get clarity on the funding and push for a baseline of the full \$21.7 million, as</u> <u>well as to continue to push to fix the competition model and extend the deadline further.</u>

### Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative

The COVID-19 pandemic had long-lasting effects on young people, including their mental health. During the first few months of the pandemic, 1 in 600 Black children and 1 in 700 Latinx children lost their parent or caregiver to the pandemic in New York State, more than double the rate of white children. Losing a caregiver is associated with a range of negative health effects, including lower self-esteem, a higher risk of suicide, and symptoms of mental illness. According to pediatricians, addressing the impact of family death on young people will "require intentional investment to address individual, community, and structural inequalities." In late 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) declared a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health; and the Surgeon General followed suit by declaring a Youth Mental Health Crisis. Furthermore, according to a 2022 survey from the Institute of Education Sciences, 69 percent of public schools reported an increase in students seeking mental health services that year, but 43 percent of schools "moderately agreed" that they could "effectively provide mental health service to all students in need." Only 13 percent "strongly agreed."

Given these growing mental health needs among young people, we propose using approximately \$3 million in new Council Initiative funds to create a new Youth Mental Health initiative. This new initiative would provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs – such as Beacons, Cornerstones, COMPASS/SONYC, and others-with a focus on out-of-school time. Programs would be able to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs – much in the same way the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative functions for older adults. These funds could also offer supports for youth workers when dealing with mental health crises, or creating proactive programming for mental health wellness.

The communities facing the highest risk for mental health concerns are the same communities who have historically lacked access to appropriate mental health services. It is generally accepted that youth mental health services are more effective when provided in a safe and trusted setting, which makes CBO-led youth programs the perfect environment for these supports. If we genuinely want to confront this crisis, it is vital that our young people have access to comprehensive mental health services that address the many stressors they are facing with substantive and professional care.

#### Baseline the Promise NYC Program with a \$20 Million Annual Investment

Due to restrictions on certain funding sources, the only public early childhood education programs that undocumented children can directly join are 3-K and Pre-K programs and federal Head Start. This leaves a major gap in child care for undocumented immigrants, including the tens of thousands of recent asylum seekers in New York City. To help address this challenge, UNH urges New York City to invest \$20 million in the FY 2025 Adopted Budget to baseline the new Promise NYC program to provide subsidized child care to low-income undocumented children.

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). The 6-month program launched in January 2023, and after a six-week period of administrative preparation, providers were able to begin outreach to families in February. Providers are contracted to serve a total of 600 children citywide for the remainder of the fiscal year through June.

For NMIC (Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation), this venture into child care services was new for the organization, yet they were chosen due to their presence in both Manhattan and the Bronx and the strong relationships they hold with the community they serve. Unsurprisingly, they did not need extensive outreach efforts; the program's popularity was swift and substantial, emphasizing the pressing need for child care services, particularly among undocumented community members. However, the budget allocation still falls short of addressing the demand, with NMIC only being able to serve 110 children in Manhattan and 125 in the Bronx, while having over 400 children waitlisted.

Promise NYC was funded with \$16 million in the City's FY 2024 budget after extensive support and negotiation from the Council. However, this funding was secured before the majority of new asylum seekers arrived in New York City, and it was not baselined, so programs are anticipating that child care will end on June 30th and undocumented families will abruptly be left without a child care arrangement.

We urge the City to extend funding for Promise NYC to \$20 million in the FY 2025 budget and each year thereafter so that undocumented families can continue to access the affordable, subsidized child care they need. This investment will allow providers to expand the number of children they serve, including funding for increased staff capacity necessary for invoicing and matching families to available child care providers. With an expanded budget, the goal is to further facilitate families' access to care and serve as a pipeline into the K-12 school system, solidifying its status as a crucial community resource. In sum, Promise NYC has emerged as a lifeline for families facing childcare challenges, illustrating the positive impact that accessible child care can have on individuals, families, and communities.

### Reduce Barriers Preventing Asylum Seeking Families from Accessing Youth-Serving Programs

Even with the creation of Promise NYC, newly arrived families face many hurdles in accessing childcare and youth programs, challenges that New York's CBOs are unable to address without financial and administrative support from the City.

Settlement houses have been welcoming immigrant New Yorkers since their founding in the late 19th century, and today's wave of the newest New Yorkers is no exception. Settlement houses are experts at pivoting services to support the most urgent needs in their neighborhoods. According to a September 2023 survey of UNH members, 72% reported an increased presence of asylum seekers in their youth programs.<sup>7</sup>

However, settlement houses have described several barriers to young people and families engaging in these programs:

- Lack of transportation Youth residing in shelters who participate in afterschool
  programming are not able to take advantage of free bussing that is provided at the end
  of the school day.
- Need for additional bilingual staff With an increase of youth whose first language is not English, providers have stated a need for additional bilingual staff who can support youth in their own language. This issue is compounded by the persistent staffing shortage in early childhood and school-aged youth programs due to low wages.
- Inconsistency due to 60-day shelter timeline Even when families are able to overcome other barriers to enroll their young people in childcare or afterschool programs, they may receive notice and be required to move sites, displacing young people from the program they were enrolled in.

The City's inability to provide consistency for newly arrived youth and provide supports to keep them enrolled in childcare and afterschool programs is a missed opportunity to support our newest New Yorkers. However, we must note that with the current proposed cuts, making these changes to expand access to afterschool services to newly arrived New Yorkers will only create an inundated system that is unable to accommodate the need. For the City to appropriately tackle this issue, it must simultaneously restore the cuts to afterschool, early childhood education, and summer services, while removing barriers to access.

### Invest In The Human Services Workforce and Make a Long-Term Investment By Creating and Funding a Prevailing Wage Schedule

Human services workers in New York City are grossly underpaid. Across UNH's network of settlement houses in New York City, 76% of their total budget comes from government sources,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> UNH, Settlement Houses Supporting the Newest New Yorkers: Voices from the Field, <u>https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991539/UNH\_Voices\_from\_th</u> e\_Field\_Report\_1252023%281%29.pdf?1702991539

and 65% of that is from New York City. Unfortunately, contracts from New York City often do not include sufficient funding to pay workers a fair and dignified wage.

Wages have failed to keep up with both inflation and changes to the job market, and as a result the human services sector continues to sit on the cliff of a staffing crisis. On average, more than a third (35%) of UNH settlement house members reported double-digit job vacancy rates of 10% or higher in 2023, up from 31 percent the previous year, and nearly two-thirds (65%) of UNH settlement house members reported that job positions remained vacant for 3 months or more in the past year, including 14% who said that positions remained vacant for 6 months or longer.

Without increased budgets in government contracts to cover wage increases, nonprofits will be unable to recruit and train the next generation of nonprofit leaders, setting future New Yorkers up for significant barriers to accessing services that grow over time. Further, insufficient staffing has made it increasingly difficult for nonprofits to serve New Yorkers, leading to under-enrollment and program closures which then leads to budget reductions and a vicious cycle that harms New Yorkers seeking services.

We thank the City Council and Mayor Adams for funding a 3-year Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human service workers. This will provide immediate relief, we must do more to undo years of budgets that left behind human service workers.

### Create a Prevailing Wage Schedule for Human Services Workers

UNH supports Int 0734-2024 (sponsored by Council Member Stevens) to establish a prevailing wage for city-contracted human service workers, which would require City agencies to include sufficient funding to cover those wages in contracts, and track implementation of those wages by human service contractors. While prevailing wage schedules are an imperfect tool to address the current conditions faced by human service workers, it is a significant improvement from the status quo. This process to design a true prevailing wage system is arduous and will require careful analysis, but we cannot continue to afford ignoring the need. For years, the government at every level has asked nonprofit partners to do "more with less." This dynamic has pushed our sector to a real breaking point, and our workforce has suffered the consequences. It's time for us to look beyond stopgap measures and towards efforts that would have a long-lasting impact on the human service sector.

### <u>UNH urges the City Council to pass CM Stevens' prevailing wage legislation and fully fund it in</u> the FY25 budget to limit impacts to programs.

Taken together, these two measures will provide immediate relief and a long-term solution to an ongoing problem that has limited New York City's human services sector.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at <u>nmoran@unhny.org</u>.



184 ELDRIDGE STREET NEW YORK NY 10002 212–453–4555 UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG Testimony of University Settlement before the New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committee on Children and Youth, Chair Althea Stevens

> Submitted by Letty Hawthorne, Assistant Director of Atlantic Terminal. University Settlement

> > March 22, 2024

Chair Stevens and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Letty Hawthorne, and I'm the Assistant Program Director at Atlantic Terminal for University Settlement.

We would like to raise budget concerns that our afterschool programs are potentially facing.

We believe the DYCD should reconsider how they calculate Rate of Participation (ROP). Since COVID, the landscape for how families use after school has changed, but that does not mean there is not the same, if not more, need.

For example, parents who have the flexibility for hybrid work may only need 2-3 days of after school for their children, but we would not be able to count these students towards our ROP requirements.

As well, many students are now receiving 2-3 days of additional academic tutoring support offered by their schools during afterschool hours. These students need our afterschool programs for the other 2-3 days of week, but again, we would not be able to count them towards our ROP if we enrolled them. We don't believe that afterschool programs should be pitted against the academic supports that the schools offer.

We are excited to welcome and support asylum seekers in our programs, but the systems created by the city make it difficult for asylum seeking students to enroll in our programs.

Since their busses only run during the beginning and end of the school day, many of these students are unable to enroll in our programs because there is no transportation for them. Because of the city's 60-day shelter rule, these students are moved between schools, which is destabilizing for them. Even if they can enroll in afterschool programs, they can't stay for longer than a few months.



184 ELDRIDGE STREET NEW YORK NY 10002 212–453–4555 UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG This inconsistency in the student population makes it difficult for afterschool programs to maintain stable enrollment, and as our funding is dependent on an inflexible rate of participation, we are also worried about how this will negatively impact our programs.

We believe that there are simple steps that the city can take, such as expanding the bus schedule for asylum seekers, that would benefit both the students and the community by stabilizing the programs.

We want and can support our newest young New Yorkers. We believe CBOs like University Settlement are positioned well, with multilingual and culturally diverse staff, to support students and families.

The challenges described are true for all afterschool programs, but impact our Cornerstones even more acutely, as our Cornerstones programs are outside of schools, and therefore have an additional burden when it comes to outreach to the student population.

We also reiterate the need to:

- Restore \$6.9 million to provide COMPASS afterschool services for 3,538 youth.
- Restore \$19.6 million to preserve extended hours and Friday programming for Summer Rising middle school students.
- Preserve Learning to Work (LTW) and Community Schools programming once federal stimulus funding expires.

For the COMPASS programs, there is a mismatch from the budget cuts that will require afterschool programs to cut seats and the need that we see from our families.

The Summer Rising cuts will leave our middle school participants with nowhere to go this summer and many staff without summer employment, which they count on as the cost of living continues to increase.

Finally, we continue to struggle to recruit and retain staff due to the low pay and limited hours of the part-time positions. If we don't have the staff, then we can't enroll students. We appreciate the multi-year COLA investment that the Council and the City has committed to our sector. We urge the Council to pass CM Stevens's prevailing wage legislation, which would require City agencies to include sufficient funding to cover those wages in contracts, and track implementation of those wages by human service contractors, and fully fund it in the FY25 Budget to limit impacts to programs.

If you have any questions, please contact me at lhawthorne@universitysettlement.org.



### New York City Council Committee on Education, Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair Committee on Youth Services, Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair

### Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York Submitted by Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy

### New York City Council Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget Hearing Committee on Education Committee on Children and Youth

I respectfully submit the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is among the City's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult — and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities.

The YMCA is also a proud member of the Coalition for Community School Excellence, the Campaign for Children, and the Emergency Coalition to Save Education Programs. As a member of these networks and coalitions we support their policy and budget agendas.

We stand with the Council, and our non-profit partners, to oppose the devastating budget cuts to the education and youth service systems which are proposed in the Fiscal Year 2024 November Budget Modification and the Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget. While we thank the Administration for the reversal of the cuts to Community Schools in Fiscal 2024, as well as the commitment to not include additional cuts in the Executive Budget, we question the Administration's justification for moving forward with such detrimental cuts to education and youth services in Fiscal 2025 and in the outyears. We are deeply concerned with the 10 percent reduction in city tax levy dollars to New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and every agency whose work supports the human services sector and serves as a lifeline to all New Yorkers.

Furthermore, the clock is ticking for NYCPS who will see the expiration of \$1 billion in federal stimulus funding that supports critical and essential programs as soon as July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. With no

YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK 5 West 63rd Street New York, NY 10023 cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org contingency plan on how to sustain these programs, on top of the cuts made to agencies, as well as the expiration of one-time city funding, New York City is facing one of the largest divestments from education and youth services in modern history. Budgets reflect our priorities, and this budget demonstrates to our youth, families, communities, school staff, and nonprofit providers that this Administration does not value their needs. How can we elevate and empower the next generation of New Yorkers if we take away the critical resources that sustain their systems of care and further their development? How do we keep families in the City who are overburdened by the cost of living, the cost of childcare, and face the loss of critical supports for their young ones? This budget as is will decimate access to invaluable services that support child and youth development, social and emotional wellbeing, school readiness, and are central to families staying in the City and flourishing their communities.

Citywide, <u>80% of families cannot afford</u> childcare or after school programs:

- Across the city, families can pay up to 63% of their annual income on childcare or after school care.
- The inability to secure childcare resulted in a loss of \$23 billion in economic activity in NYC in 2022.
- New Yorkers departing the city at the fastest rate in 2023 were families making between \$32,000 and \$65,000 annually.

### Early Childhood Education

The Preliminary Budget eliminates \$170 million from early childhood education services, citing inefficiencies including unused seats. This could translate into 9,000-15,000 seats being cut from the system, leaving many children without Pre-K and halting the timeline of the citywide expansion of 3-K. We counter that narrative by emphasizing that underutilization is the result of barriers to access; including language access for parents who may not see advertisement for programs in their home language, inadequate mapping of need by district, and generally the lack of information families have received about the program. Community-based organizations like ours are the backbone of the City's plan for early childhood education, so we are concerned by the impact these cuts will have on the New Yorkers who rely most on our services to make sure their children begin their educational journeys in safe environments.

The YMCA's early childhood programs serve nearly 1,000 children. The need for early childhood education continues to increase across the city, with the YMCA having a waitlist at more than half of our program sites. Early childhood education is a vital part of New York City's social and economic ecosystems, as it allows parents and guardians to go to work, supports the development and enrichment of children, and enhances the quality of life for some of our most vulnerable communities. To sustain these ecosystems, as well as meet the growing need for youth programs and early childhood education, community-based organizations like the YMCA need seamless support from our agency partners. This means fully staffed divisions, clear and timely communication, and designated points of contact. This way we can ensure a smooth process in hiring and onboarding staff, and in turn have the support we need to maximize our enrollment. None of which can occur with direct cuts to Pre-K and 3-K, central support, and an

agency-wide hiring freeze which further exasperates bureaucratic hurdles to the delivery of childcare early childhood education.

Additionally, to ensure equity and access, NYCPS needs to enable non-profit providers of early childhood education to directly enroll children and youth onsite, as well as continue to convert school-day, school-year early childhood education seats to full-day, year-round seats. We stand with the City Council in opposing these cuts and we support the Council's efforts on holding the Administration accountable to strengthen our city's early childhood system, by protecting Pre-K and 3-K, expanding access to full day/year-round programs for all children, especially infants and toddlers, and achieving salary parity for early childhood educators.

### **Youth Services**

The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget proposes to eliminate \$6.9 million from COMPASS afterschool (DYCD), a loss of 3,538 COMPASS slots, and \$19.6 million from the Summer Rising Program (NYCPS). Thousands of young children and youth stand to lose programs that offer safe and nurturing environments for their learning and development, and that allow parents to work. As youth and families try to rebuild from the pandemic, our City's young people require opportunities to grow and connect with peers in ways that advance their social emotional learning, physical development, academic preparedness, and overall opportunities for success. Programs like COMPASS are vital lifelines for countless children, offering crucial support, mentorship, educational opportunities, and a safe space for personal growth and development. Reductions in these programs would disproportionately impact low-income youth and families who rely on these services for their children's growth and safety and as an indispensable resource for working caregivers who otherwise cannot afford fee based programs. We urge the City to protect afterschool access and work to strengthen the system in the future.

The YMCA Afterschool program, which includes six Beacon, eight SONYC, 26 COMPASS, ten Community Schools, and one Cornerstone site, empowers nearly 8,000 children and teens each day. The YMCA helps young people expand on the academic knowledge they acquire during school hours, develop their social and emotional learning, build rapport with their peers, and increase confidence, all of which empower our youth to excel both inside and outside of our program sites. We also are concerned about the reduction of hours for Summer Rising programming for middle school students. Having access to safe, supportive summer programming is crucial for all youth; undermining that will have negative impacts on children and families. In line with our partners, we stand with the Council on opposing these harmful cuts and call on the City to release a new COMPASS RFP that reflects today's reality of the rising need for affordable childcare with an expansion, rather than this proposed constriction. Additionally, we call on the City to establish a year-round, 12-month youth service contracting model and shift to a K-8 summer program model that draws on best practice.

In line with other early childhood education and youth services providers, we call on the Administration to:

Build a stronger, more inclusive future for our city by investing in the following critical services:

- **Restore** \$170 million in city tax-levy funding to early care and education. This restoration would protect the path to 3-K expansion and protect Pre-K capacity for 9,000-15,000 children.
- **Restore** \$6.9 million to COMPASS after school, protecting services for 3,538 youth.
- **Restore** \$19.64 million to the DYCD portion of Summer Rising programs for middle school youth, ensuring that youth can have a full 5 days of programming from 8am to 6pm and field trips.
- **Restore** and baseline \$20 million for PromiseNYC.

The City should take the following steps to ensure the ECE and youth services workforce can support access to services:

- Fund an Early Childhood Education labor deal that will a) Ensure salary parity between certified and uncertified teachers in CBO settings with their DOE counterparts, b) Guarantee a wage floor of \$25 per hour for all support staff in CBO settings, c) Restore longevity differentials for CBO staff who have been in their positions for many years, in line with what DOE teachers receive, and d) Fund per diems for staff working in extended day/year programs.
- **Release** new RFPs for SONYC and COMPASS that cover the actual cost of care. Increase the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of no less than \$22/hour for staff and ensure year-round contracting.
- **Pay** providers on time and make a concerted effort to catch up on all payments owed to ECE and youth service providers. Move ECE contracts out of PreKids and into PASSPort to ensure transparency and inclusion of ECE-contracted service delivery in ongoing contracting and invoicing reforms.

### Community

### Schools

The Preliminary Budget proposes a \$8 million cut to Community Schools in Fiscal 2025 and in the outyears. Additionally, \$55 million in federal stimulus expires this July, which was used to expand the Community Schools Initiative to 421 community schools from 217, meaning more than half our Community Schools are facing severe, if not complete, cuts to programming this upcoming school year. Furthermore, Community Schools are also facing a \$14 million loss in one-time city funding bringing the total gap for Community Schools in Fiscal 2025 to \$77 million. New York City has one of the largest portfolios of community schools in the country and serves as a leader in upholding and implementing the model. A cut of this magnitude undermines the incredible progress of Community Schools; progress in boosting and sustaining student attendance, supporting the social and emotional well-being of students, and bridging the gap between our families and resources such as food and/or health care. The YMCA has ten community schools across the city, each of which works in getting our kids on the path to success by developing essential life, community building, and leadership skills.

Community School providers also deliver real time support and solutions to families as unprecedented challenges transpire. For example, many Community School providers were the first responders during the onset of the pandemic, connecting families with essentials such as food and clothing, translation services, and even delivery of electronic devices for remote learning. Community Schools also provided aid to families during the Bronx Fire tragedy and work to support students who are asylum seekers as they navigate the school system and classrooms. Community Schools are an essential part of the communities they work with, beyond the walls of a classroom. The proposed cut stands to be the largest divestment to the Community Schools Initiative since its inception in 2014. Any divestment of Community Schools would ultimately lead to a void in the community and foster a distrust of the City and providers.

### Federal Funding Stimulus Cliff

Over the last few years, NYCPS has been using around \$1 billion per year in temporary federal COVID-19 relief funds for important long-term programs that were necessary long before the pandemic and will continue to be critical long after, such as 3-K, preschool special education, Summer Rising, 450 school social workers, Community Schools, school nurses, restorative justice, 60 school psychologists, 75 coordinators working in homeless shelters, bilingual staff, translation and interpretation, dyslexia and literacy initiatives, and more. The funds are expiring, and unless the City adds funding to the budget to continue these programs, they could be rolled back or eliminated as soon as July. We join with the Emergency Coalition to Save Education programs in calling for the city budget to include funding to maintain the many important education programs currently supported with funds that will be expiring this year. Do not let these programs end on your watch.

The reductions in the November and January Plan, as well as the expiration of federal stimulus dollars and expiration of one-time city funding, jeopardize access to quality early childhood education, youth services, and Community Schools, impacting children's foundational years as well as families' economic well-being. We must reject cuts that harm and destabilize the education and youth services systems and sustainably fund these programs in Fiscal 2025 and in the outyears.

We urge the Council to look carefully at these cuts and to fight to protect key services for young children, youth, and families across the city. We appreciate your support, leadership, and partnership in helping deliver quality services, and helping more youth learn, grow, and thrive. Thank you so much for fighting for children, families, teachers, and non-profit providers across New York City.

If you have any questions, please contact Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy, and Advocacy, at <a href="mailto:cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org">cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org</a>

#### Testimony to Youth Services Preliminary Budget Hearing, NY City Council

#### March 22, 2024

#### Prepared by David Calvert, Citywide Coordinator of the YouthBuild NYC Collaborative

Good afternoon, honorable Chairwoman Stevens and Committee members, my name is David Calvert, representing the YouthBuild NYC Collaborative. Let's talk about YouthBuild and the need to restore citywide funding for the Speaker Initiative for YouthBuild to \$2.1 million – eliminating last year's hurtful 17% cut – and to expand and enhance services in FY2025 by increasing the citywide allocation to \$3.1 million.

The Collaborative coalesces nine New York City YouthBuild sites located in all five boroughs. YouthBuild is a program model that we originated here in NYC – in East Harlem -- 45 years ago. During a period of nine months, youth aged 16-24 who are out of school and out of work – Opportunity Youth – obtain education coursework to get their GEDs, as well as vocational credentials and experience, leadership development, community service, counseling, and then a year or more of placement and follow up services. The program caught a wave during the tough 1980s decade, spreading around the city and state, and in the 1990s it went national, and now each year 8,000 Opportunity Youth do YouthBuild in 46 states, and thousands more overseas in 11 other countries. At my home base in East Harlem, we have run a YouthBuild program every year since 1979, and have graduated 1,550 youth. I am pleased to have been active in the start-up and build-up of YouthBuild, since 1978, a journey that has taken me from East Harlem to seven other countries, and since 2010, back home in El Barrio.

The City Council is not alone in funding YouthBuild. Federal US/DOL grants designated for YouthBuild sites can be accessed, but normally fewer than half the operating sites in NYC obtain those scarce grants. To ensure full coverage for NYC youth, since 2014, the Council fills the gaps in the federal funds by allocating \$2.1 million each year by way of a Speaker Initiative, delivering full, comprehensive services to hundreds of Opportunity Youth. All nine of the NYC programs are bolstered by these enabling grants, and for several, when other funds are unavailable, it allows them to keep their doors open, to survive and thrive. This City Council Speaker Initiative has been decisive in making sure each year that 550 hard-pressed youth receive the best services they can in order to set them up for success. It has enabled YouthBuild to expand its offerings and support systems for more and more young people. Virtually all program participants come from difficult backgrounds; the wraparound services they receive at their YouthBuild site provide the tools they need for sustainable futures.

However, last year in the build-up to FY 2024 the Council was facing budget constraints and applied a drastic 17% cut to the citywide YouthBuild Initiative, further taxing the always-creative YouthBuild directors to operate quality programs around the city. It is imperative that as a first step, the Council reestablish \$2.1 million as the baseline for YouthBuild funding.

#### We respectfully request these two steps:

### 1) that baseline funding for the Speaker Initiative for YouthBuild be reestablished to its longtime level, <u>\$2.1 million</u>, and

2) that it be expanded this year to <u>\$3.1 million</u>, so that more lives may be transformed by this productive funding. The increase will ensure that each program is supported sufficiently to provide the top shelf training and follow-up that the students deserve. Approximately half of the city's YouthBuild sites are likely to have active US/DOL/YouthBuild grants for FY2025; for them, the Council money will provide a needed supplement and match. And for the other sites, the Council funding will be determinant in guaranteeing the capacity to continue.

The City Council is making a difference for young people who have been hit the hardest. Since 2014, 3,500 YouthBuild alumni have benefitted from direct, full-time YouthBuild participation due to the support of the City Council; this support must continue. As has been said, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Thank you for your time and concern, and for caring deeply about the Opportunity Youth of our City.

David Calvert, dcalvert@yayb.org,

Le conseil municipal dait savoir être un jeune à New. York. Cela ne fait que 4 mais depuis que je vis à New York mais les allentes sont encemen pour pourdoir sintégrer à la société car elle income des diggerentes Cultures. Et pour un geune adulte il gant rester fort mentalement pour pouvoir Den sortin malqué l'aide des services sociaux sa relêve un grand defi. Mais méamoins c'est une étape de la vie qui est tier importante. Furlant lour un jeune Comme moi qui ne parle par l'anglais c'est un grand defi. De ja la ville fait assez de bonner choser pour les jeunes Comme leuris portactions qui est pour moi un about their important Can nous connairssons la vie des jeunes adultes de nois jours. Et els nous assister mentalement jour nos tien être et pour le reste des citagens, ils nou habillent, nous vourissent et nous enseigne. e que faimenais qu'ils ayoute d'avantages des logements to et d'emplois pour les pennesset des les inscriser tous à l'école Je ne viris aucun mal que la ville faites pau les penner. da seule chose que je de mande c'est d'écouter la jeunes car ils incorner des balents. Riensin Je ne suis par de Neve York mains cla n'empéche Pas que je mintègre avec la société car Je suis une personne qui est socialte et aimable. Des fois sa nous avrive de nous dentir un peut ignorer can Nous avrivons sur grande ville qu'an me connait par et qu'ar se Comprend par la langue. Si j'étail membre du Condeil municipal le que je ferais pour les Jennes de New-gout. Sa serait Pour les écartes davantages et être en contact avec eux pour Voic leur idéen-DOB: 6/3/2004 Z Abdoul 1/2iz Dieller

de conseil nunicipal doit savoir que la Ville fait de son mieux Concernant le foit du bien pour des jeunes de neut-york seulement de peuplement sur la Ville ne fait pas resoitire. l'Etat doit preudre des disposibilité concernant les logement car pour le noment le problème de logement nous fatigue vrainent Actuellement On n'est pas de neverjour nous sommes venu pour charcher protection contre l'extusion sociales - familiale et fieligieuse d'autres même politique etc... Mais pour le moment beaucoup de chose n'on pas chauger sar on est consider. Comme des mégraines des gens sans salleur, nous re poursons pas dire frien à chang car nous sont tous -a la Riecherche d'une vie méilleure mais pour le moment je tient à Vous dêre qu'on vis l'enfor sur Tone déhois nous dimerons que de ville Mides Etats- unin nous viens plus en aide et quils sachent que nous Voulons tous être utile dans la Société Americaines. Si j'étais membre du conseil municipal je proudrais plus soint des sufant " des jeunes "- car je sais - chacun est venu pour un but précès et personne ne souhaite du mai à quelqu'un on Veut juste apporter du bien chez vou l'État doit contrêter le nombre de lit pour des journes car vivre dans les Shelters d'Adrette c'est pas faile c'est la loi du plus foit. On compte sur la ville five l'Amerique - Vive NeW-york Et atterei à Safehouison' (209-W 1255) con à Vâi dire c'ert la seule Orga misation qui à pris soint de Moi.

Abdoulage Diallo 11/10/2021

Le conseil municipal doit sousin qu'être un jeune al-dulle à new york relever un grand dezi.

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Since I returned to America. I will be comfortable I cat very well because Streetwork, it help prople who wont to eat and need a place to steep. Because my first time returning to America here, I don't know anyone. I stayed asleep on the train because the day I came here I storp slept. Because I came back here I suffer a lot. I missed helping people since I came back here also to go to school. They helped me find a lawyer, I thank them It Just who keeps people busy who does everything Very much for them. I thank then very much since we got back We need more Shelters for young peoplex and places like Stretwork

He didn't have family in his home country to help him so heleft & Since coming here Streetwork has helpedme. Street work took care of him, provided what he model, so he did not feel alone. I was steeping on the subweys and sometimes at the mosque, the too I would like long term shelter . Since I would like to refume studies, I want to enroll they told me it was already foil the is hoping to get help to enroll in school. He appreciate evenione help, the lood, elothy, and of course We would like the same opportunities like others. Chance to make money, go to school. Stort a new like studying and working, Housing, A place to study



A mon avis depuis que je entre dans la ville de New FORK je mé sans bien avec les population je consate les juin He son bonne je vous donne un temple vous les migrant Si ont va allez quelque part a xa Ville si ont va a la gare de metro ont na pas de metro-carte les jian ont caide avec leur métre carte certaine ont caid pour nouriture et de j abi les population isont bonne mé les gouvernement doive éaide les migrant avoir la Logement 26 sont entérie de éaide mé à mon avis Rés gouvernement doivé prandré disposion He donné juste 30 jours dans selter- si les 30 jours est fini pour les rénouvement tu vas paravière 4 jours déhour Ville and Ville

Amadou Diallo Des: 6/20/2004

Good Evening City Council, I hope everything is well. My name is Dawens Gracia. A 16 year old junior at Brooklyn's Institute for Liberal Arts and a proud member of the Youth Action Leadership Council.

After being recommended by my friend linitty into CCA Programming, I swiftly became a member of the Youth Action Leadership Council. Where I immediately started to gain knowledge on topics like the servant leader philosophy ,the effects of structural racism, the art of debating and public speaking as well as organizing projects.

As it relates to those projects. I am a co-lead of The NewsLetter Project and Community Benefits Project. As the co-lead of the Newsletter Project I focus on bring awareness to our program hopefully gaining support toward helping our community As a co lead of the Community Benefits Project, we respond to communities that would appreciate extra help with things like Pantry work, Donating Clothing and helping set up community gardens for later harvests. I humbly present this message to you, hoping to convey the significance of our endeavors. As stewards of our city's resources, I implore you to consider the profound impact of investing in our programs. By supporting initiatives like ours, you are not only investing in the future of our youth but also in the resilience and vibrancy of our communities. Funding our projects will not only amplify our outreach efforts but also facilitate the tangible, hands-on support that is vital for the well-being of those we serve.

In conclusion, I express my sincere gratitude for your attention to this matter. Together, let us continue to strive towards a future where every member of our community is supported, empowered, and equipped to thrive. Thank you for your consideration. Dear committee members,

I am Efren Adom, a resident in NYC. and I am 16 years old.

I am against this budget cut because parks are essential to the Identity of NYC and a great way to promote health and the environment in our city.

Some of my fondest memories as a kid are going to the park in the morning with my mom and brothers and running around and having fun; cutting funding will effectively erase this experience from the next generation. If we decrease the amount of trash management in these parks it will only increase the amount of waste people are exposed to in NYC parks and demotivate people to go out.

I recently did a research project for my AP research class and I found that the popular areas in NYC parks (specifically Soundview park) where people congregate had less trash than the places people didn't congregate. If we cut the funding for waste management we would essentially also be cutting the amount of people who will go to NYC parks because they'll be too dirty.

People will also be less likely to go out if there are no park rangers keeping them safe. I know my mother would have never risked her kids' life to go to the park every morning if there were Park rangers ensuring their safety in parks. Me and my friends use the park as a place to go outside, have fun, stay healthy, while being safe. If the parks are too dirty or dangerous we would just stay home eating junk and playing video games instead of out and being healthy. I know from personal experience some of the funnest times to be at a park is during events because the community comes together and does something together and supports each other. We can't just erase this staple of our neighborhood, of our city

Dépuis que je suis rentre ici je suis un paiemai pastres. bien parce que jeine dors pas tres bien Ul Parce que parce que je voubis le dire je n'ai pas trouve même La ou jou dormi je sais pas je voulais atudier atlecale Je nai pas eu. On niest de neuvyers nous sommes pour chercher portection contre hamdoulitah, je suis àtaise maindent parce que gemange très bien

DOB: 12/30/2004 IBNAHIMASOW It's tough out here. I feel like even though I have my own apartment now I know what it feels like to be homeless. Ever since the pandemic things here have been very unsafe. The city should do more things to support young folks with kids. Raising twins in a subway system with no elevator has been really difficult. I have to carry a double stroller down the stairs. More people should know about medical transportation.

There should be more resources like Streetwork and The Door. And there should be more resources for different age groups. Especially for folks after 25. There should be more youth beds ad beds that feel more personal, not like a prison. More beds in shelters that see you as people and not as criminals. There should also be more resources that help men who have experienced violence.

I don't know how the city views me. My experience with the cops is not that good. They show up late and blame me. Alot of people judge a book by its cover. They look and feel like they know.

The city should do specific activities to celebrate youth. They should do free financial class for youth and have more pop up education events

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Keishla Zabala-Ortiz Dob 2/17/2000

Jai mais sen bien a New York meme dans les Contre mon seul bleme joi pas lu un endroit ou joi vais rester tranquil Gest pase que jai pos des trallaille dons la Rue to ou dons le train ou dons le. bus jou viencontre des gens bien jou rencontre des gens Moulaise or 209 W 125St fai vencontré le meilleur person des New jork ou menne de l'omerrique il maide A alloire preque tout braiment ja Sait pas comment les remercier 

Momadou Alpha Diallo 02-01-2000

de puis que j'er suis rentre je suis alle ham doulah, j'espère bien les tout avait change pie voulais tedire jenai pas tronvé même la oujou dorme je sais pas je vou lais atundiér a le cete chercher pertetion handouble en alaier main hunt au àlaise main tent pouce que je mange tres bien Début de source un l'entre de puis nons sommes alles au centre ca fait zojon dans un geul temps ca finit, pour renouveler ca vadurer beaucoup même pour aller at le cole je cherche je sus fatigue je naime pas et je voulouis que vous moitez pour ga parce que depuis nous Somme rentre : en American qui Buce un homme je rencontre les homme bien et les hommes maisrais aussi. On orcherche mais ils ont fatigue, on na pas enjevoubisque vous nous aimons pour og c'est une moilson avec pour étudien, je voubou étudier. On compte sur brille vuve l'Amerique. vive Nour jork a Safehouisen (209- Vr 1253) car à vrou direnisation qui a puis soint de Moi.

DOB: 6/8/2004 Momaden Balde

#### Testimony to the City Council Committee on Youth Services March 22, 2024 Delivered by: Mauricia Harry, member of Freedom Agenda

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and Committee members. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mauricia Harry. I'm a member of Freedom Agenda and the Campaign to Close Rikers, and I'm a Brooklyn Native. I am writing this testimony to emphasize the need for quality mental health treatment for our children, youth, and families. Due to lack of resources and multiple barriers, most people in our communities are not even aware of their diagnosis, and even those who are, cannot find adequate help without their disability being seen by society as behavioral. As a result, our communities are being punished and abandoned on Rikers Island, while their mental health continues to deteriorate and worsen. Children are always the first to be impacted by the traumas that lack of and historical neglect communities like mine, face.

Since my younger brother was 12, I've watched him cycle through the system, despite DOE and DOH knowing about my brother's diagnosis of both ADHD and oppositional defiance disorder. This was hard for me as an older sister, I wanted to desperately find him the help he needed but I didn't know what it looked like, and the resources I could find were only punitive. When my parents asked for help, it came in the form of multiple ACS cases which were used as a threat to my brother and my parents for them to change behaviors that neither of them had control of. My brother became a target to NYPD at an incredibly young age, which created huge turmoil for the family and isolated my brother by labeling him throughout Brooklyn. This City has failed my brother every step of the way, from his childhood to his 2.5 years sitting on Rikers Island, to now sitting in prison miles away from me and his family.

Today, I am one of the main support pillars in my brother's incarceration. But I am also a mother of 2 boys, 1 is diagnosed with the same ADHD/ ODD as my brother. I refuse to let the same thing happen to my child. As our city continues to overfund agencies like the Department of Corrections and NYPD, I fear that my brother's experience is still the reality for the youth in my community because of the Mayor's budget priorities.

Under Mayor Adams, our city's youth incarceration is up and so are racist practices like Stop & Frisk. The Mayor plans to maintain a \$2.6 billion budget for the Department of Correction, and clearly plans to send more of our family members there. This isn't where money needs to go, I promise you. We should use the budget to fund families in ways they've never been invested in before. With my written testimony I'll include a list of <u>budget priorities from the Campaign to Close Rikers</u>.

Thank you, Mauricia Harry Good afternoon,

I want to thank the chairs of the Committee for this hearing.

My name is Nedelyn Diaz and I am a lived expert from The NYC Youth Action Board & Project UNITE. Project UNITE is a collaborative effort between the Coalition for Homeless Youth, the NYC YAB & YouthNPower - transforming care at the Children's Defense Fund.

Our work is about breaking down the silos between the systems and services for runaway & homeless youth, and young people who have experienced foster care.

#### PAUSE

As someone who has experienced homelessness and housing instability, I am deeply connected to protecting young people and securing housing in a proactive and safe way. Peer Navigators are essential because they provide young people with guidance as credible messengers and are easier for young people experiencing housing instability to relate to. Despite this, they are among the most vulnerable workers in our system – and their positions have been cut in recent budgets. This takes a toll on the young people they serve, and illustrates the barriers to economic mobility and professional opportunity for those who enter this career.

In this budget, we **MUST restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System**, which will cost \$1.6 million.

#### PAUSE

In this budget we must also increase the number of DYCD Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Programs for homeless young adults ages 21-24. As someone who has stayed in a TIL I can tell you that without one, I would have had to face street homelessness or remain in a more unstable environment. There are a lot of young people who don't have somewhere to sleep. We are calling on the City to include funding for 40 additional 21-24 yr olds beds at AND 60 beds for 18-21 yr olds. Those 100 additional beds require an investment of \$5.6 million. It's important that we make sure these older youth have beds because they face the risk of otherwise having to go to an adult shelter.

#### PAUSE

Our third budget demand is that we "**Right-size**" **Runaway and Homeless Youth Residential Contracts by increasing the kinds of services young people can get, which requires adding \$5.5 million.** We need mental health supports, like therapists, and peer roles like credible messengers. We also need evaluation services to help determine what help young people may need to emerge from homelessness and housing instability so that they can thrive.

The city has a duty to protect and empower young people to emerge from the crisis they were forced into and this is one way forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to give you my testimony today.

The Learning to Work (LTW) program run by CAMBA is an essential initiative that deserves continued funding from the NYC Department of Education. Working at St.Nicks Alliance for a half a year, I see how this program plays a crucial role in re-engaging students who have dropped out or fallen behind in high school credits, providing them with the necessary support to graduate.

With programs offered at ten transfer high schools and two Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC), LTW caters to diverse student needs. Transfer high schools are specifically designed to motivate students who are struggling academically, while YABCs offer evening academic programs for those who cannot attend school during the day. This flexibility ensures that LTW reaches students who might otherwise slip through the cracks of the education system.

CAMBA's LTW program goes beyond traditional education by offering a comprehensive range of support services. From academic and student support to career and educational development, college advising, work preparation, skills development, alumni services, and paid internships, LTW equips students with the tools they need to succeed both academically and professionally.

By investing in LTW, we are investing in the future of our youth and our community. By providing opportunities for at-risk students to obtain an education and pursue their career goals, we are breaking the cycle of poverty and creating a brighter future for everyone. Therefore, I urge City Hall to continue funding the LTW program, ensuring that every student has the chance to reach their full potential.

Shanece McGregor

To City Council:

As a concerned citizen of NYC and a founder of a M/WBE + 501c3 hybrid business, I am testifying to the hearing with DYCD on March 22, 2024. I agree with Councilmember Athena Stevens's remarks about DYCD budget cuts. We at Youthful Savings had to layoff NYC workers due to budget cuts, and we can't serve youth with the SYEP program. Please see the attached email confirming our cut and an impact report we submitted to DYCD. We make an impact, which can also be utilized as a needed service for migrants. We wrote a letter to the Mayor that I also submitted.

I look forward to seeing some genuine reform from our elected officials. Happy to help in any way!

Kind regards, Somya R. Munjal



September 15, 2023

#### **Mayor Eric Adams**

**Mayor's Office - City Hall** City Hall Park New York, NY 10007

**Mayor's Residence - Gracie Mansion** E 88th St. & East End Ave. New York, NY 10028

Dear Mayor Adams,

Thank you for all you have done for New Yorkers since taking office in 2022. Your leadership in the efforts to recover New York City's economy, reduce inequality, improve public safety, and build a more vital, healthier city are fundamental initiatives for the growth of justice and equity for our citizens and youth. We salute all of these acts and initiatives.

<u>Youthful Savings</u> (YS) is a learning ecosystem dedicated to socioeconomic empowerment through the youth. We define this as mental well-being, economic empowerment, and community development. Our youth are inspired to become heart-intelligent world citizens through our technology-enabled learning platform, <u>The Learning Marketplace</u>, and have the opportunity to economically empower themselves through our online store, <u>Youthful Savings Marketplace</u>, an official M/WBE based in New York City.

You can continue to transform the city through your initiatives. You can continue to bring change to the lives of many youth - and we are supporting you on that!

*YS* participated in this year's Summer Youth Employment Program, of which we have been part since 2020, teaching NYC youth through a custom 6-week program via our '*Youth Entrepreneurship for a More Inclusive Global Economy*,' a customized program provided to the organizations we have worked with, in which youth learn how to address mental health issues in

our current technology-driven society and develop necessary team building, communication, and dispute and conflict resolution skills through our other learning exercises from our proprietary learning platform, *The Learning Marketplace*. Through this program, all youth received a 1-year subscription, which allows youth to continue to learn through learning exercises, in-person events, and monthly Live Experiences - even if SYEP is already over! They were inspired to start their own businesses on our platform, *Youthful Savings Marketplace*, where many of them have already shipped out their first sales since starting their business in mid-August!

The results are impressive. We had the opportunity to send a report to the *Department of Youth* and *Community Development* with data showing the youth's economic and social empowerment and financial and technological literacy growth. Let us share the following data: after completing the program with us, more than 50% of the youth feel empowered to start their own businesses because we equipped them with the necessary tools and skills! Additionally, over 85% of the youth increased workforce development skills in business, finance, and technology.

Because our commitment to training and equipping young people is fundamental, we are currently building a pipeline for multinational companies, such as *Mastercard* and *Google*, intending to offer youth-qualified jobs.

Another essential part of the offer we provided to the youth this summer was 3 in-person "*Lunch and Learn*" events, which offered the youth complete learning experiences, putting them in direct contact with guest speakers who passed on important knowledge and advice that they will be able to use in the future. In the 1st event, the youth learned from the owner of *Sauce Restaurant* about his business experience and how he has contributed to developing his community; in the 2nd event, we presented the youth with speakers from the *City University of New York* (CUNY) and the *State University of New York* (SUNY). This lunch was very well attended due to the concern and desire of many youth to pursue their university studies and learn, for example, what skills are noted when applying for a scholarship. For our final event, we had guest speakers from *MasterCard* and *Northeast Financial*, in which youth learned how to build their businesses and empower themselves personally through the power of sincerity and personal finance.

One youth, Gianna Perez, has been particularly active as a Youthful Savings community member and an active CEO of her new business, <u>BagInStyle</u>. Her excellent work, in addition to being an example to the team, is a real inspiration to other young people! Because this shouldn't be forgotten, and we firmly believe that these youth deserve to receive sustainable and real investment in their businesses and ideas, we are including Gianna in our <u>Community Investment</u> <u>Fund</u> (CIF), where we offer monthly capital that helps grow youth businesses.

An essential aspect of this CIF is that by buying and selling through the <u>Youthful Savings</u> <u>Marketplace</u>, youth contribute 10% of their earnings to the CIF, which allows the fund to regenerate and encourage kind capitalism, thus creating a more inclusive economic system!

#### "Youthful Savings is a system challenging the economy through youth. This experience taught me you can give and receive to help others." - Gianna Perez, Catholic Charities, Summer 2023

The present has been full of challenges, difficulties, and successes. However, the approaching future shows us that there will be turbulent times when the current problems will intensify. *Youthful Savings* is attentive to new challenges, and part of our work is to update and diversify our offer to empower our youth with the best tools to be conscious citizens tomorrow!

Knowing the situations migrant youth are currently facing in NYC, our desire to work with young migrants has a clear purpose: to integrate them into New York's thriving economy! We are part of the solution by preparing our ecosystem to include and serve these youth. *Youthful Savings* can make a difference by teaming up with the city or other organizations to provide education to these youth using our unique and efficient educational ecosystem. Equipping them with the right tools to thrive in the future empowers them socioeconomically. All youth have the potential to succeed! They need a springboard and faith in their growth as responsible and active community citizens!

We are happy you will continue your important work, inspiring many youth in this great city. You are bringing change this city hasn't seen for many years, but the work and the mission can't stop here. Mayor Adams, you can count on *Youthful Savings* to continue to empower our youth by providing them with essential skills that will permit them to thrive in the future!

With respect,

Somya R. Munjal, CEO and Founder Youthful Savings 188 Grand St., Unit 280 New York, NY 10013 M/WBE in New York / NYC

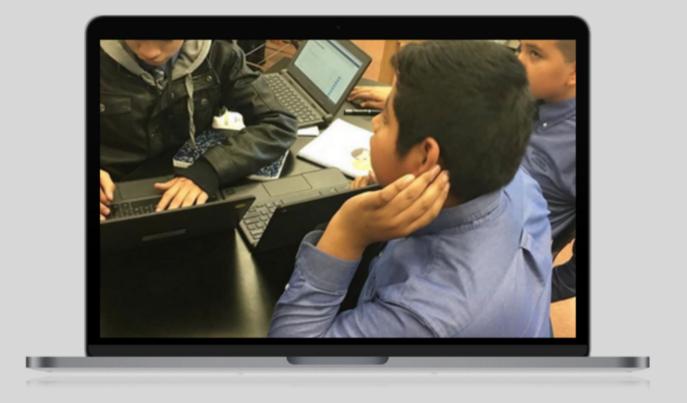
Enclosure: Post Program Report

# **INVEST IN THE YOUTH**



# YOUTHFUL SAVINGS

# A LEARNING ECOSYSTEM DEDICATED TO SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



### PROGRAM REPORT - SYEP 2023 City of New York - Department of Youth and Community Development

PRESENTED BY: Youthful Savings

# ABOUT US

### **THE COMPANY**

**Youthful Savings** is a learning ecosystem dedicated to socioeconomic empowerment through youth. We define this as mental well-being, economic empowerment and community development. Our youth are inspired to become heart-intelligent world citizens through our technology-enabled learning products.



**GOALS & OBJECTIVES** 

**Encourage Personal and Community** 

**Economic Empowerment** 

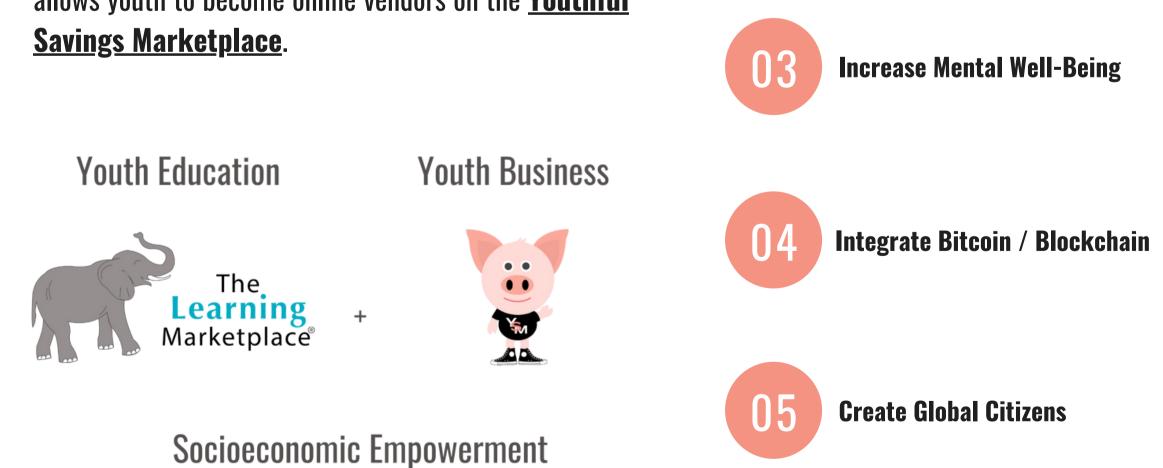
**Development** 

01

02

## THE ECOSYSTEM

**The Learning Marketplace** is an innovative learning platform that inspires youth to become the best generation yet. We feature revolutionary downloadable learning exercises that include a wide variety of topics such as art, entrepreneurship, personal finance, technology, Bitcoin & NFTs, and more! We also teach monthly **Live Experiences** where our learning exercises come to life. Youth are able to earn bitcoin for attending our Live Experiences! Our most popular learning exercise, **My Own Business Challenge**, allows youth to become online vendors on the **Youthful** 

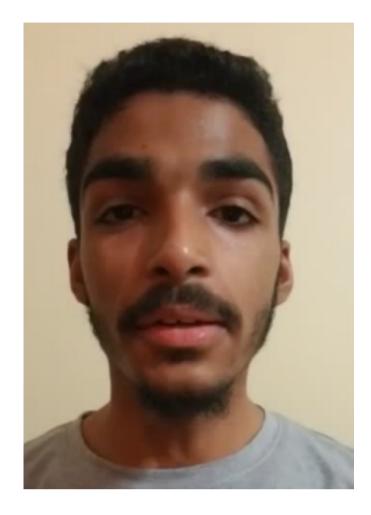


## **MEET JOSE SANTANA!**

"When I first joined the Youthful Savings summer program in 2022 through Children's Aid (SYEP), I was challenged to learn many important business-necessary skills such as effective communication, sales, journaling, and technology services."

"I was able to launch my first ever business (**Yourganize**), which has allowed me to grow as a person and contribute to society by becoming the change in the economy that the world needs. I am honored to be a part of such an impactful program that has a mission and vision that is so needed in the world that we are living in today!"

We are proud to have Jose Santana as our <u>Community</u> <u>Investment Fund (CIF)</u> member. His dedication to improving his business and his desire to grow have earned him a place in our program. The CIF is committed to promoting **equality through equity**, and we are excited to support youth like Jose in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Along with being a part of the **Children's Aid program**, he has provided essential tech assistance to other young people, helping them achieve their goals. We look forward to seeing Jose's continued growth and success in his business and his efforts to give back to his community.



Watch Jose's Pitch Video HERE!

"Being able to intern at Youthful Savings throughout the 2023 summer program has been a one of a kind experience! Being able to support the youth who are going through the program on a day-to-day basis has allowed me to make an even bigger positive impact on society by helping other young people learn tech/business skills that will lead to them being better humans and ultimately **better youth which leads to a better world!**"



Logo of Yourganize - Jose's Business Visit his vendor page via the link in the logo!



## **EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE!**

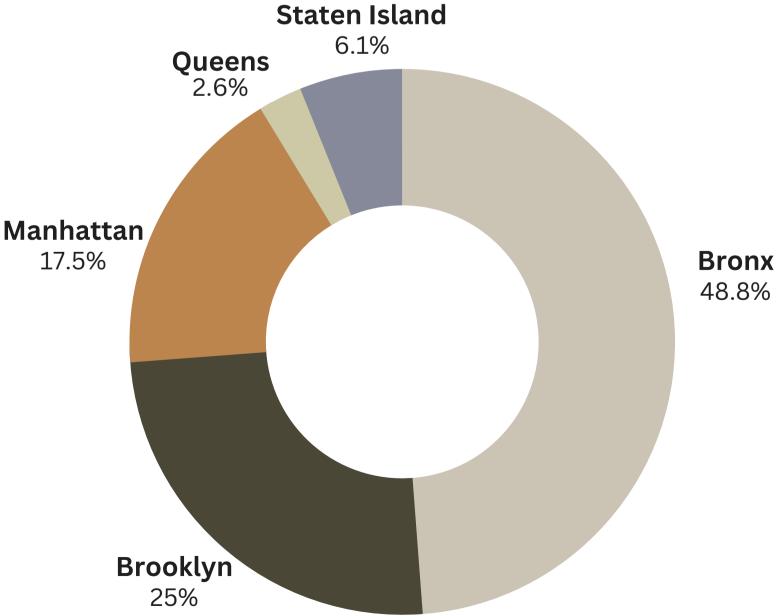
Youth joined us for both self-paced learning and live instruction for six weeks (via Google Meets, Google Classroom, and three in-person events). Each received individualized courses from The Learning Marketplace focused on mental well-being, financial education, college planning, entrepreneurship, technology, and personal development.

During this instructional event, youth took Pre- and Post-Assessment surveys to measure the increase in mental well-being, economic empowerment, and community development.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS REACHED**

We worked with over 1500 youth from various organizations and from all the city's boroughs:

- Children's Aid 90 youth
- Catholic Charities 101 youth
- Community Counseling and Mediation 83 youth
- Bronxworks 204 youth
- St. Nicks Alliance 100 youth
- Infinity Educational Programs (500 licenses of customer programming we will continue working with them throughout the year)
- The Greater Ridgewood Youth Council (500 licenses customer programming- we will continue working with them throughout the year)



"My favorite thing was learning about young entrepreneurship and how businesses can get started even as a teenager! I have grown by starting my own business and making sales! I will use this by always inspiring others that they too can start a business with a goal and hard work."

### Johnathan Harris, Bronxworks, SYEP 2023

"I have grown this summer through these lessons and Google meets giving me the push I need to be more confident and become a better version of myself. I will integrate this growth into the upcoming school year by taking on more leadership roles and participating more in class rather than shying away, which would make me understand lessons better!"

Jasmine Man, Children's Aid 2023

"My favorite thing that I learned was about business, how to start one, manage it, and why I should start it. I've grown by starting my own business and sharpening my skills! I can integrate what I learn into all of summer and my life by staying hard-working and continuing to advocate for myself."

### **Gianna Perez, Catholic Charities, SYEP 2023**

"My favorite thing to learn this summer was about crypto and how it can influence you negatively and positively. I improved this summer by considering this information and will now extend my knowledge in all of the things we've learned!"

Jose Johnson, Community Counseling & Mediation 2023



"This summer, my favorite was learning about starting a business. SYEP offered valuable guidance on business ethics, which has been helpful for me. Through this experience, I've gained a greater understanding of the importance of starting a business young and how it can positively impact one's prospects. I will continue to learn and grow through the experience, which will help me become a more well-rounded individual and better prepared for the world beyond."

### Lucy Lin, St. Nicks Alliance 2023

4

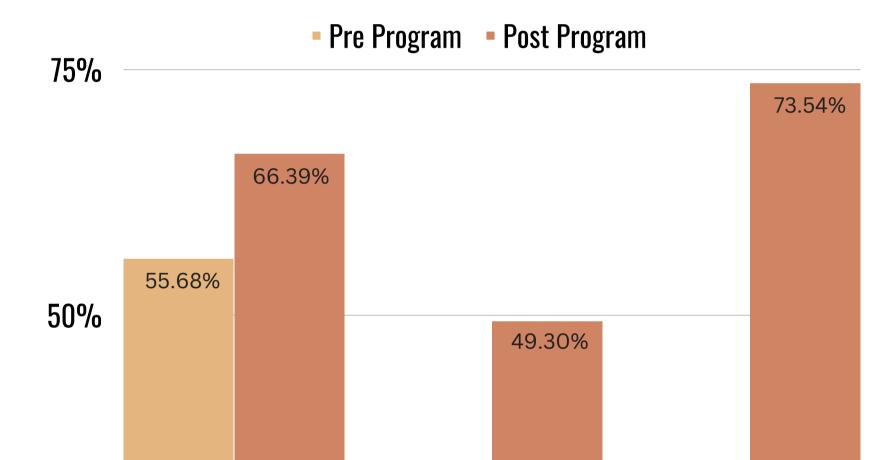
## FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

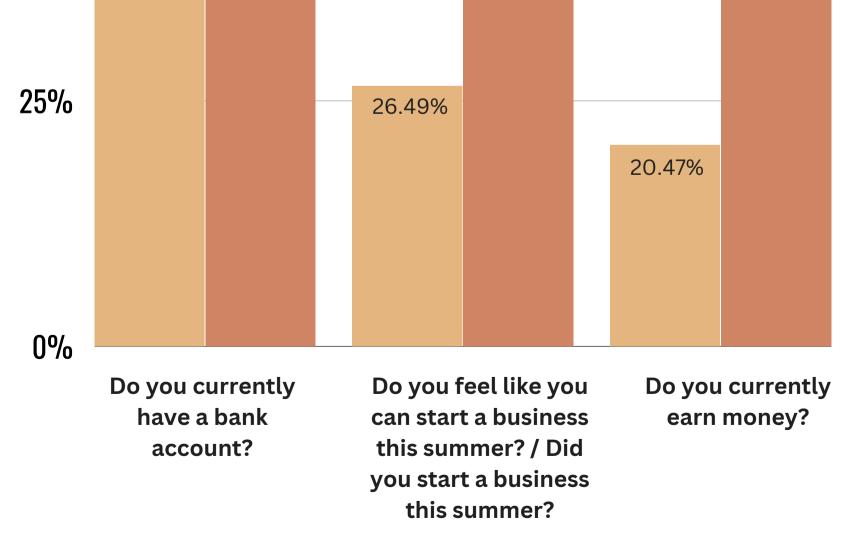
Financial empowerment gives the youth crucial knowledge and understanding of how they can **spend their money**, make **wise financial decisions**, and have access to **resources to help them reach their goals**.

By analyzing the surveys, we can see the **interest**, **planning**, **and practicality of financial literacy** among the youth.

The growth in the number of young people earning money is remarkable, thus demonstrating the importance of SYEP and our commitment to ensuring that the youth learn about saving and investing throughout the program!

Almost **50%** of the youth feel empowered to **start their own business**!





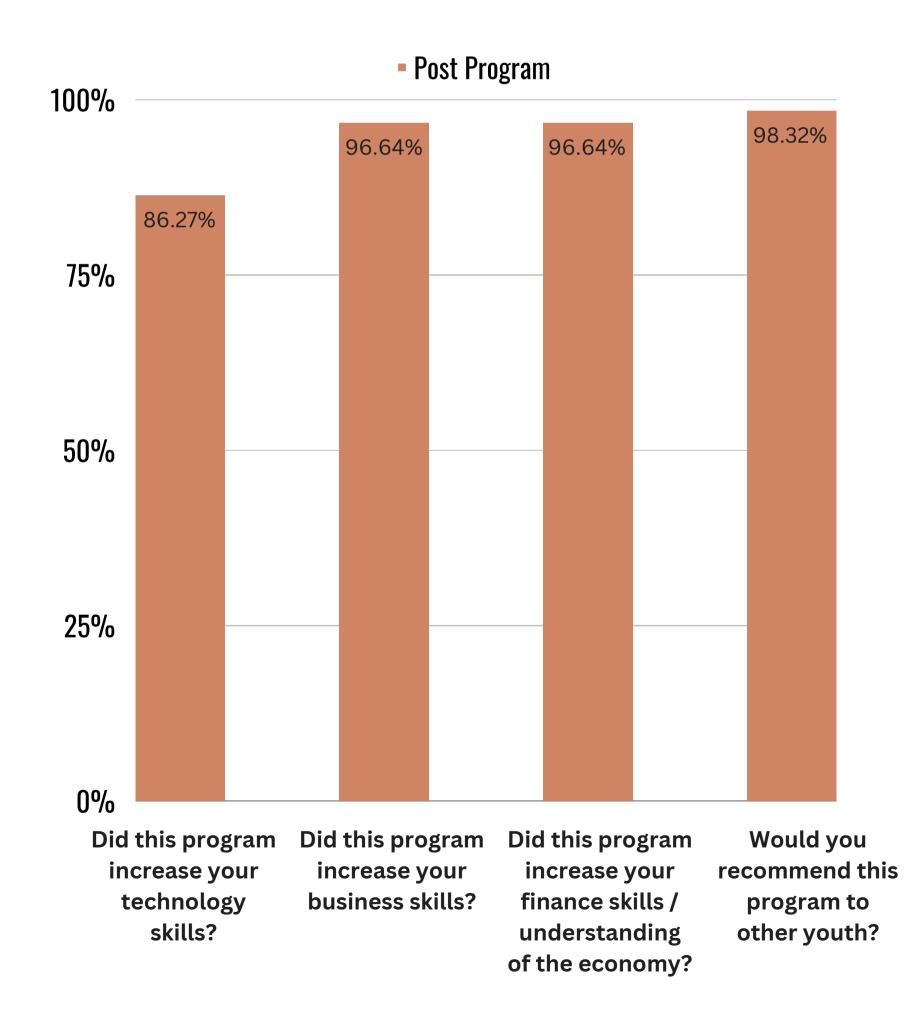
## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Workforce development was based on providing youth with essential business, finance, and technology skills.

During the program, the youth came into contact with various digital platforms - many of them for the first time, thus **ensuring a wide range of technological skills.** 

With us, they were able to **learn how to handle and use various platforms responsibly**, such as **our ecosystem** (The Learning Marketplace & Youthful Savings Marketplace), **Slack** (a communication platform used by companies), and a **Google Account** (Google Calendar, Google Meet & Google Classroom).

There was also the **development of the creative spirit through technology**, with a task to make an investment pitch video.



## **EMPOWERING THE YOUTH!**

## SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Socioeconomic empowerment is essential to **ensure the success of the future generation of global citizens.** 

As such, we provide young people with the tools and resources to break out of the cycles of poverty and the social roles assigned to them to increase their social and economic opportunities and those of their communities.

All youth received the proper education, which helped them create businesses that economically empowered themselves and their communities. The impressive youth vendors contributed to positive gross domestic product (GDP) and provided necessary sales tax revenue to their neighborhoods!

**Gianna Perez** from Catholic Charities and **Johnathan Harris** from Bronxworks started their own businesses this summer, already impacting their socioeconomic development and their communities, **contributing to a more inclusive and diverse economy!** 





Logo of Bag in Style - Gianna's Business Visit her vendor page via the link in the logo! Logo of Trailblazers - Johnathan's Business Visit his vendor page via the link in the logo!

We organized a series of 3 in-person "Lunch and Learn" events to allow youth to meet and learn from guest speakers in the community.

- On July 19, the youth learned from the **owner of Sauce Restaurant** about his business experience and how he has contributed to developing his community.
- On July 26, we presented the youth with speakers from the **City University of New York (CUNY)** and the **State University of New York (SUNY)**. This lunch was very well attended due to the concern and desire of many youth to pursue their university studies and learn, for example, what skills are noted when applying for a scholarship.
- On August 2, we had guest speakers from **Mastercard** and **Northeast Financial**, where youth learned how to build their businesses and empower themselves personally through the power of sincerity and personal finance.







### Watch the video about our youth events! Check it via the link in the photos or watch <u>HERE</u>.



# INVEST IN THE YOUTH

# **YOUTHFUL SAVINGS** THE BETTER THE YOUTH, THE BETTER THE WORLD!

### Together we educate the next generation of global citizens!



### Partners:





# **YOUTHFUL SAVINGS**

### **INVEST IN THE YOUTH** WWW.YOUTHFULSAVINGS.COM

## **OVERVIEW**

Youthful Savings is a tech-enabled learning ecosystem dedicated to **socioeconomic empowerment through youth**. We create innovative tools that increase heart intelligence focused on the following:

The

Marketplace

earning

- Educating and Empowering Youth
- **Economic Empowerment**
- Workforce Development in Business, Finance, and Technology

## THE TECH-ENABLED ECOSYSTEM

Our learning platform, **<u>The Learning Marketplace</u>** (**TLM**), allows youth to customize their learning to thrive in the real world. We offer learning exercises focused on:

- Financial Literacy
- **Character Development**
- Technology
- Entrepreneurship  $\bullet$
- **Vertical Farming & Sustainability**

A custom course from TLM, "Youth Entrepreneurship for a More **Inclusive Global Economy**," encourages youth to create impactful businesses in their communities.

Graduates can start a business on the **Youthful Savings <u>Marketplace</u>** (YSM). As youth buy and sell on YSM, they contribute 10% of their earnings to our **<u>Community Investment Fund.</u>** 



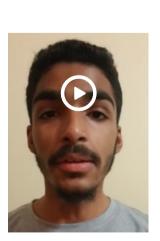
### Strong learners on **TLM** and active vendors on **YSM** can also join **<u>HireYouth.Al</u>** to gain technology jobs and internships.

### ENCOURAGE KIND CAPITALISM THROUGH BOTTOM-UP ECONOMICS

Graduates who start a business on **YSM** receive continuous capital from the Youthful Savings Foundation! We provide them with a prepaid Mastercard® through a partnership with USIO. This encourages kind capitalism through bottom-up economics.



We have been working with youth from the cities of New York, LA, Chicago, and soon Cascais, PT. We have served over **10,000 youth since our inception. Key successes include:** 



- Financial Empowerment: Almost 50% of the youth feel empowered to start a business.
- Workforce Development: Over 85% of youth feel they grew their business, finance and technology skills.
- Socioeconomic Development: Measurable increase in mental well-being, economic empowerment, and community development in each youth served.



# **YOUTHFUL SAVINGS**

## The better the youth, the better the world!

What if, together, we could contribute to youths' financial and technological education? What if we could guarantee their socioeconomic empowerment?

That's Youthful Savings's purpose: to ensure everyone has opportunities. To ensure that youth learn, grow, and become better citizens!

## Meet Jose Santana: An inspiration for New York City's youth!

Jose, a 17-year-old senior student from the Bronx, is the **CEO of Yourganize**, and was part of the **Youthful Savings summer program in 2022 through Children's Aid.** 

"When I first joined Youthful Savings, I was challenged to learn many important businessnecessary skills such as effective communication, sales, journaling, and technology services."



Jose's interest in technology and business became clear when he joined us. His enthusiasm during the program **led him to create his 1st business:** <u>Yourganize</u>, a company focused on helping other young people make their business websites!

"I was able to launch my first ever business, which has allowed me to grow as a person and contribute to society by becoming the change in the economy that the world needs!"

But sometimes success is also accompanied by challenges and difficulties. After the program and the start of his business, Jose realized that the school where he studies (a health school) was not what he would like to pursue in the future - and he considered giving up his studies. Through our mentorship he has remained in school and is now senior president of his class.



## **INVEST IN THE YOUTH!**





#### Watch Jose's Pitch Video and visit his vendor page!

More than training youth, we want to ensure they have access to education, as this is the great equalizer for socioeconomic barriers.

In this way, we helped him, **through the weekly accompaniment** we carry out with our youth, not give up on school and keep working towards his dreams!

### **Constant investment in youth!**

Investing in young people is a continuous endeavor that empowers them for the future. To prepare Jose for the future job market, he did a **summer internship at YS in 2023, working as a Community Manager** and assisting young people who needed help during our summer program. In this way, we could develop Jose's workforce skills and ensure that he practices his knowledge.

"Being able to intern at Youthful Savings throughout the 2023 summer program has been a one of a kind experience!"

Thanks to his excellent work and dedication, Jose became the **1st** young person to join <u>HireYouth.Al</u> - our newest platform, to provide our youth with paid internships at YS partner technology companies!

This way, we can help Jose get more job opportunities and ensure his continued socioeconomic empowerment!

"I am honored to be a part of such an impactful ecosystem that has a mission and vision that is so needed in the world that we are living in today!"



Breitman, Julia (DYCD) to me. Nurus, Colette, Rodrigo 👻

#### Mon, Dec 18, 2023, 2:35 PM 🕁 🕤 🗄

#### Hi Somya,

It's wonderful to hear from you and thank you for sharing these great updates.

We're excited to see the launch of Career Pathways and so much of our work highlighted. Unfortunately, as you may have also heard, we are undergoing a series of budget cuts and have a lot less funding for programming outside of our core services. While we won't be able to fund Youthful Savings this summer directly, we encourage you to partner with our contracted providers who may be able to fund the work themselves. Should anything change, we will definitely be in touch.

Thanks so much for your partnership and happy holidays!

Best,

Julia

From: Somya <<u>somya@youthfulsavings.com</u>> Sent: Friday, December 15, 2023 9:19 AM To: Breitman, Julia (DYCD) <<u>breitman@dycd.nyc.gov</u>>; Salam, Nurus (DYCD) <<u>NuSalam@dycd.nyc.gov</u>>; Grant, Colette (DYCD) <<u>cgrant@dycd.nyc.gov</u>> Cc: Rodrigo Martins <<u>rodrigo@youthfulsavings.com</u>> Subject: [EXTERNAL] Workforce Development For Youth x Youthful Savings

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. Forward suspect email to <u>phish@oti.nyc.gov</u> as an attachment (Click the More button, then forward as attachment).

03/22/2024

Youth Action Leadership Council Member Brownsville Youth Center 179 Lavoinvia Avenue

Dear Council Members,

It serves me well to advocate on behalf of my community. My name is Treyana Harry. I am a sales representative and solopreneur. I am also a resident of East New York. I attend Regent University. As one of the members of the Youth Action Leadership Council program, I co-lead the newsletter letter project. Being part of this youth development program has impacted my leadership and collaboration skills.

I have learned how to foster critical thinking in the workplace and implement problemsolving strategies on issues that affect our societal norms. I felt heard because I was surrounded by people who valued my opinions. Through the program, I have had the opportunity to receive mentorship, improve my research skills, practice public speaking, teach others younger than me, volunteer at a local community church, attend youth justice events, and facilitate event planning to raise awareness about issues that young people face.

Our curriculum provides opportunities for young people to explore their individuality and self-awareness. It improved their educational perspectives on topics like energetic worldviews, political science, youth activism, behavioral economics, environmental sustainability, and creative opportunities. Funding for this program will allow adolescents to be in an environment where they feel safe, educated, and proud of themselves for developing a new skill set that will benefit their lives.

Sir Claus Moser, said, "Education costs money, but then so does ignorance."

I sincerely appreciate your help.

Best regards,

Harry

#### Greetings city council members

My name is Yarlyn Duran, and I am a 17-year-old student from the Dominican Republic who resides in Cypress Hills, I proudly attend Brooklyn Ascend High and I am a member of the Youth Action Leadership council.

In CCA I've attended the Youth Action Leadership Council and the community carpenters program

- 1. Community carpenters focus on renovating and rebuilding community gardens to grow fresh produce. In this program, I was able to rebuild old gardens and plant seeds to grow produce for the community.
- 2. I am also a member of the Youth Action Leader Council where I am co-leader of two prestigious projects in the Youth Action Leadership Council, namely the Community Benefits project and the Know Your Rights campaign project. As a member of YALC, I have had the opportunity to learn how to have the confidence of a leader, help those in need, and how a team functions as leaders. One thing YALC has pushed me to do is to be creative and have the ability to do critical thinking, we also do advocacy work such as supporting the Youth Justice Opportunities Act, and the community's Not Cages.

The funding would allow programs like YALC and the Community Carpenters Program to expand and bring about more community benefits. Thank you for your time and consideration in allowing me to testify City Council.

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	Address:
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and the second
THE COUNCIL MORE
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
THE OTTO TOTAL (STARS)
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
Date: 3-22-2024
(PLEASE PRINT) Name: NOCA KOUMATE
Address:
P
I represent:ALCALSh
Address: 4 W: 43ra St NMC
THE COUNCIL
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: 3-77.2024
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: <u>GRICA GAMBIE</u>
Address:
I represent: LOWER GAST SIDE GIRTS CLUB
Address: _UD2 E. STM St MyC
THE COUNCIL yours
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
(STARS)
Appearance Card
Lintend to ennear and much as I.e. N
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor
Date: 3.22-2024
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: SAMWYA Grover
Address:
I represent: Bella Abrug Leadenship Institute
Address: 695 PARILARC MC 1002
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE COUNCIL young person
THE CITY OF NEW YORK (STARS)
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: 3-22-20234
(PLEASE PRINT) Name: ZAUdg ROJA
Address:
I represent: Egure SKATING & Harlem
Address: 3el W. 125M St MyC
THE COUNCIL younger
THE CITY OF NEW YORK (STARS)
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: 3-22-2024
(PLEASE PRINT) Name: MCKENZTE LEW'S
Address:
Foundation alt 1
Address: 36 W. 125m St MC
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK (STARS)
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: 3-22 7024
Name: Mahlah Abudu
Address:
I represent: MgUTE SLATING & Havlem
Sal WID CINET NAVA
Address: <u>Slop W. 25th St. MC</u>

	THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK
	Appearance Card
I intend to	appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition Date: 3-77-7374
Neme	(PLEASE PRINT)
	hypolica Royz
	SINS Write NOW 247 W. 37Th St Myc
	THE COUNCIL
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK
	Appearance Card
I intend to	appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
	Date:
4.1.1	<u>Cra Jankwitt</u> <u>Blim</u> <u>Literacy</u> Assistance Center <u>SS. Broad St. Myc</u>
	THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK
I intend to a	Appearance Card Res. No
	in favor in opposition Date:
Name:	Anthony Puscing
Address:	THELEGAL AND SALETY
	101 THOMAS ST 10 PC
Address:	

THE COLNCH
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: 3/22/24
Name: Jamie Boolovich
Address: 495 Flatbush Ave Suite 10 Brooking 1122
I represent: Coulition for Homeless Youth
Address: Same
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date:
Name: Tatricia Mullen
Address: 250 Bedford Park Blvd,
I represent: <u>PChhan College ALC</u>
Address:B-lok-ord Vark Blvd,
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
Date: 3-22-2023
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: <u>KAtje King</u>
Address: I represent: <u>Not Mern Man Latton improvent Corp.</u>
Address: 45 Walsword Are MC
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

A second				
THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK				
Appearance Card				
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No				
in favor in opposition				
Name: Dana (PLEASE PRINT)				
Address:				
I represent:				
Address:				
THE COUNCIL				
THE CITY OF NEW YORK				
Appearance Card				
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No				
in favor in opposition				
Date:				
THE COUNCIL				
THE CITY OF NEW YORK				
Appearance Card				
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No				
in favor in opposition				
Date: (PLEASE PRINT)				
Name: Dephue MONTANIA				
Address: I Latayette street NY NY 1003				
I represent:				
Address:				
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms				

	THE COUNCIL
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK
	Appearance Card
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
	Date:
	(DI FASE DRINT)
	Name: Nevita Bailey
	Address: I represent: PYCD
	Address:
	THE COUNCIL
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK
	Appearance Card
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
	in favor in opposition Date:
	(PLEASE PRINT)
	Name: Keith Howard
	Address: DVCD
	I represent:
	THE COUNCIL
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK
	Appearance Card
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
	🗌 in favor 🔲 in opposition
	Date: (PLEASE PRINT)
	Name: Daryl Rattray
	Address:
эс.	I represent: <u>VYC</u>
	Address:
	Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
Date:
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Alan Cheng
Address: DYCD
I represent:
Address:
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
Date: 92224
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: <u>Angelina Martingz-Jubig</u>
Address:
I represent:
Address:
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
🗋 in favor 📋 in opposition
Date:
Name: Jeremy Halbridge
Address: 2 Latagette St.
I represent: DYCD
Address :
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: (PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Rong Zhang
Address:
I represent: $\underline{\mathcal{D}}$
Address: 123 () () () ()
THE COUNCIL THE CUTY OF NEW YORK
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition
Date: 3/22/24
Name: Make Gabbert
Address:
I represent: DYCD Cemmit Deve Commit
Address: 123 William St
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition Date: <u>3122/24</u>
(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: <u>Kob Baltares</u>
Address: *
I represent: <u>LAUF AIS</u> <u>US</u>
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE COUNCIL Ø
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
🗌 in favor 🔲 in opposition
Date:
(PLEASE PRINT) Name: Ellinor Rutkey
Address:
I represent: The DOUG
Address: 555 Broome St NY NY 10013
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
in favor in opposition
Date: (PLEASE PRINT)
Name: AShley Rajky Mar
Address:
I represent: Safe Harizon Streetwork P. g. Pct
Address: 33 FSSEX St
THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Appearance Card
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No
Date:
Name: CAITWN PASSARETTI
Name: CAITINN TASSARETTI
Address:
I represent: LITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR Children &
Address: CAMPAILIN for Children

	THE COUNCIL	
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK	
	Appearance Card	
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor  _ in opposition	
	Date: Name: DRI SOPHINE CHAKLES Address: COFCCA	
	I represent: Address: 254 W. 3 St. WYC	
	THE COUNCIL	
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK	
	Appearance Card	
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition	
	Date: Name: Amile Minguez Address: I represent: Good Shepherd Services Address:	
-	THE COUNCIL	
	THE CITY OF NEW YORK	
a	Appearance Card	
	I intend to appear and speak on Int. No Res. No in favor in opposition	
	Date: (PLEASE PRINT) Name: AVID FREUDENTHAL Address:	
	Address:	
	Address: Address:	
	Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms	